

By the author of Eleanor of Aquitaine

ALISON WEIR

*Katherine
Swynford*

*The Story of
John of Gaunt
and his
Scandalous Duchess*



KATHERINE SWYNFORD

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VINTAGE BOOKS

This book is dedicated to

Bruce and Sandy, Peter and Karen and

John and Joanna to mark their marriages.

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Author's Notes

I have used the form 'Katherine' (rather than 'Catherine') throughout, as Katherine's name is usually spelt with a K in contemporary sources. The correct mediaeval form of her name is 'Katherine de Swynford', but I have chosen to refer to her as 'Katherine Swynford', as she is traditionally and popularly known.

It is worth noting that in *John of Gaunt's Register*, Katherine's name is given as either 'Katherine' or 'Kateryn(e)'. The language of the court and the aristocracy at this time was Norman French, and these spellings indicate that John — and others - probably pronounced her name in the French way as 'Katrine'.

The modern equivalent of fourteenth-century monetary values has been given in brackets throughout the book. For currency conversion, I have used an invaluable internet website,

Measuring.Worth.com , produced by Lawrence H. Officer, Professor of Economics at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and Samuel H. Williams, Professor of Economics, Emeritus, of Miami University.

Introduction

This is a love story, one of the greatest and most remarkable love stories of mediaeval England. It is the extraordinary tale of an exceptional woman, Katherine Swynford, who became first the mistress, and later the wife, of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, one of the outstanding princes of the high Middle Ages.

Katherine Swynford's story first captured my imagination four decades ago, when I read Anya Seton's famous novel about her, *Katherine*. This epic novel made a tremendous impact on me as an adolescent, and still has the power to move me today. And I am not alone, because it has hardly been out of print since its first publication in 1954, and came ninety-fifth in the top hundred favourite books voted for by the public in BBC TV's *The Big Read* in 2003. (Interested readers will find more about this novel in the Appendix.)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that I have wanted to write this book for forty years. But even when I became a published author in the late eighties, no publisher would have contemplated commissioning a biography of this relatively obscure woman. And that remained the situation for many years, until the recent explosion of interest in all things historical, which inspired me to seize the chance to make my longstanding, secret dream come true. I am truly indebted to my editors, Will Sulkin, Anthony Whittome and Susanna Porter, for their support and enthusiasm for this project, and to Elisabeth Dyssegaard, who suggested that I write about Katherine as well as John of Gaunt, the subject I originally proposed.

Katherine Swynford deserves a biography for many reasons. First and foremost, she was romantically linked to John of Gaunt, one of the most charismatic figures of the fourteenth century, and their passionate and ultimately poignant love affair is both astonishing and moving. Katherine was clearly beautiful and desirable, not to say enigmatic and intriguing, and some of her contemporaries regarded her as dangerous also. Her existence was played out against a vivid backdrop of court life at the height of the age of chivalry, and she knew most of the great figures of the epoch. The renowned poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, author of *The Canterbury Tales*, was her brother-in-law. She lived through the Hundred Years War, the Black Death and

the Peasants' Revolt, knew passion, loss, adversity and heartbreak, and survived them all triumphantly. Her story gives us unique insights into the life of a mediaeval woman.

Yet Katherine was unusual in that she did not conform to many of the conventional norms expected of women in that age, and in several respects her story has relevance for us today. Feminist scholars are now beginning to see her from a new perspective, as a woman who was an important personage in her own right, a woman who — in a male-dominated age — had remarkable opportunities, made her own choices, flouted convention and took control of her own destiny. Katherine was intelligent, poised and talented, and fortunate enough to move in circles where these qualities were valued and encouraged in women. Among the choices she faced were ones that would be familiar to women today, although her modern counterparts would not have to endure the moral backlash that at one time rebounded on Katherine and probably wrecked her life. Yet they would identify with her as a woman who coped brilliantly with the sweeping, and sometimes devastating, changes of fortune that befell her.

Above all, Katherine Swynford occupies an unprecedented position in the history of the English monarchy; dynastically, she is an important figure. She was the mother of the Beauforts, and through them the ancestress of the Yorkist kings, the Tudors, the Stuarts and every other British sovereign since - a prodigious legacy for any woman. Without her, the course of English history would have been very different.

Writing a biography of Katherine Swynford poses its own particular problems, however, for her voice has been silenced forever: no letter survives, no utterance of hers is recorded. None of her movable goods are extant, and we have barely any details of the clothes she wore, so we cannot determine her tastes in art, literature or dress. Her will is lost, and with it any insights it might give us into her feelings for John of Gaunt, her moral outlook, her family relationships or her charities. She is one of the most important women in late-fourteenth-century England, and yet so much about her is a mystery to us. She is famous but, paradoxically, she is little known.

Furthermore, the contemporary sources to support a biography of Katherine Swynford are meagre and fragmentary at best. She rates barely a mention in the chronicles of the period, and such references as there are usually reflect monastic prejudice against a woman who was regarded as 'a she-devil and enchantress'.

The best evidence for her life lies mainly in the dry entries in *John of Gaunt's Register*, the *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, the Duchy of Lancaster Records in the National Archives, and the civic and clerical records of Lincoln, Leicester and other places. The rest is largely inference. Yet there is a wealth of evidence on which to base those inferences, as will be seen. There is monetary evidence, and archaeological evidence. Much remains of the many castles and manor houses owned by John of Gaunt, in which Katherine would often have resided, not the least of which is his magnificent range and great hall at Kenilworth, which she would have known well. Houses in which she herself lived for long periods — Kettlethorpe Hall in Lincolnshire, and the Chancery and the Priory in the close of Lincoln Cathedral — also survive in part. There is, in addition, much surviving documentation on John of Gaunt's fabulous but long-lost Savoy Palace, so it is possible to place Katherine and her prince in the context of vividly recreated authentic settings.

So although there is a great deal that is not known about Katherine Swynford, and the tantalising glimpses of her that appear in the sources often raise more questions than they answer, there is enough to justify a long-overdue biography. This book therefore represents a quest to discover the truth about this most intriguing of royal ladies. It has led to the most fascinating historical investigation I have ever undertaken, affording unique opportunities for original research, which has encompassed delving into numerous contemporary sources (and in some cases having them retranslated), following up significant clues, sometimes into unexplored territory, examining the remains of the houses in which Katherine lived, interpreting intriguing allusions in stained glass and ancient manuscripts, and studying a wealth of pictorial evidence.

In drawing up a detailed chronological framework for Katherine's life, then piecing together the myriad pieces of information I had gathered, and analysing them within the context of that framework, I have been surprised by the interesting revelations that have emerged, some of which challenge the received wisdom about my subject, or lend weight to existing theories. Time and again, I have been surprised at what I have been able to infer from my research. It is, above all, my hope that what will unfold in the pages that follow is a convincing and challenging portrayal of a most fascinating — but elusive — woman.

Alison Weir Carshalton, Surrey April 2007

Prologue: Spring 1378

In March 1378, putting aside 'all shame of man and fear of God', John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the mightiest subject in the realm of England, was to be seen riding around his estates in Leicestershire 'with his unspeakable concubine, a certain Katherine Swynford'. Not only was the Duke brazenly parading his beautiful mistress for everyone to see, but he was 'holding her bridle in public', a gesture that proclaimed to all his possession of her, for it implied that the rider thus led was a captive, in this case one who had surrendered her body, if not her heart. And as if this were not shocking enough, the fact that the Duke was flaunting his mistress 'in the presence of his own wife' created a scandal that would soon spread throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom and beyond. Even today, echoes of that furore still reverberate in the pages of history books.

John of Gaunt's conduct in that long-distant spring led disapproving contemporaries to conclude that he had 'made himself abominable in the eyes of God', and that Katherine Swynford was 'a witch and a whore'. Thus was born the legend of the 'famous adulteress', who occupies a unique place in English history. There can be no doubt that in her own lifetime, she was the subject of great scandal and notoriety, for she was closely linked to John of Gaunt for a quarter of a century before they married, and she had already known him for many years before he wed the desirable young wife who was so openly insulted on that tour of Leicestershire in 1378. Years later, after John's wife had died and he married Katherine, controversy and criticism surrounded their union, for she was far below him in status, morally unacceptable and considered highly unsuitable in many respects. But she confounded her critics and gradually came to be tolerated and even respected.

Indeed, all the evidence suggests that Katherine Swynford was no lightly principled whore, which is what hostile chroniclers would have us believe; on the contrary, she was one of the most important female figures of the late fourteenth century, and more likely to have been a woman deserving of our admiration and esteem. Her partner in adultery — later her husband — was the son of King Edward III of England, and one of the epoch's most famous and celebrated paragons. From her is descended every English monarch since 1461, and no fewer than five American presidents.

The truth about Katherine Swynford has been obscured by people down the centuries accepting at face value the calumnies that were written about her by a few disapproving contemporaries; and, too, by nearly every aspect of her story being shrouded in mystery, exaggerated by debate or simply obliterated by time. Nearly everything about her is controversial. When and where was she born? What did she look like? How many children did she bear? When did she become John of Gaunt's mistress? What influence did she have? And what was the nature of their relationship over the years? Above all, did she really deserve all the moral opprobrium heaped upon her after her lover paraded her in public on that fateful spring day?

We will never know the whole truth about Katherine and John, for only echoes of their voices and their deeds have come down to us, but one thing is certain, and it shines forth from nearly every source: these two were lovers, and their love endured through prosperity and adversity, war and endless separations, time and distance. Love and destiny brought them together, sealing their fate and changing the course of English history itself. So this is, essentially, a love story.

'Panetto's Daughter'

Katherine Swynford, that 'famous adulteress',¹ was set on the path to notoriety, fame and a great love at the tender age of two or thereabouts, when she was placed in the household of Philippa of Hainault, wife to Edward III of England. This would have been around 1352, and Katherine's disposition with the popular and maternal Philippa was almost certainly due to her father, Sir Paon de Roët, having rendered years of faithful service to the Queen and the royal family of Hainault.

Like her benefactress, Katherine was a Hainaulter. She was born Katherine de Roët, her surname being variously given as Rouet, Roelt or Ruet, and pronounced 'Roay'. The Roëts were a prominent family in Hainault, then an independent principality located in the western reaches of the Holy Roman Empire, bordering on the kingdom of France and occupying much of what is now Belgium. This fertile and prosperous county stretched from Liege and Brussels in the north to Lille and Valenciennes in the south, and contained other thriving cloth cities: Mons, Charleroi and Tournai; all provided a market for England's raw wool, her chief export. Formed at the time of the division of Charlemagne's empire in the ninth century, Hainault had been an imperial fief since 1071, and in the early fourteenth century it was ruled by the House of Avesnes, which had come to power in 1244.

Katherine possibly had noble or even royal connections through her mother, but claims that she was closely related through her father to the aristocratic lords of Roeulx cannot be substantiated. The Roeulx were a great and powerful Hainaulter family that could trace its descent from the ancient counts of Flanders and Hainault, who were themselves descended from the Emperor Charlemagne, and from England's famous King Alfred. William the Conqueror had married a princess of that House, Matilda of Flanders, and by her was the founder of the ruling dynasties of England, the Norman and Plantagenet kings. Since the twelfth century, the lords of Roeulx had prospered mightily. Their landholdings centred mainly on the town of Le Roeulx, which lies eight miles north-east of Mons, but their name is also associated with Roux, forty miles east of Mons, and Fauroeulx, twenty miles to the south.

That Katherine shared a close kinship with the lords of Roeulx is

doubtful on heraldic evidence alone - or the lack of it. Her family was relatively humble. The chronicler Jean Froissart, a native of Hainault, who appears to have been quite well informed on Katherine Swynford's background, states that Jean de Roët, who died in 1305 and was the son of one Huon de Roët, was her grandfather. Neither bore a title. Yet it is possible that there was some blood tie with the Roeux. Paon de Roët, the father of Katherine Swynford, whose name appears in English sources as Payn or Payne, and is pronounced 'Pan', was almost certainly baptised Gilles, a name borne by several members of the senior line of the Roeux, which is one reason why some historians have linked him to this branch of the family.⁵ Of course, the similarity in surnames suggests a connection (in that period, the spellings of Roeux and Roët could be, and were, interchangeable), as does the fact that both families are known to have had connections with the area around Mons and Le Roeulx. But discrepancies in arms would appear to indicate that Paon was at best a member of a junior branch of the House of Roeux; all the same, it is possible that the royal blood of Charlemagne and Alfred the Great did indeed run in Katherine's veins.

The arms of the town of Le Roeulx were a silver lion on a green field holding a wheel in its paw; this is a play on words, for 'wheel' in French is *roue*, which is similar to, and symbolic of, Roeux. It was a theme adopted by Paon's own family: his arms were three plain silver wheels on a field of red; they were not the spiked gold Katherine wheels later used by his daughter.⁷ On the evidence of heraldic emblems on the vestments given by her to Lincoln Cathedral, Katherine Swynford used not only her familiar device of Katherine wheels, which she adopted after 1396, but also her father's device of three plain silver wheels.

If Jean de Roët was his father, as seems likely, then Gilles alias Paon was born by 1305-6 at the very latest. Thus he did not marry and father children until comparatively late in life. The references in the *Cartulaire des Comtes de Hainaut* to 'Gilles de Roët called Paon or Paonnet' imply that the name Paon was almost certainly a nickname, although it was the name by which Gilles became customarily known, and it even appeared on his tomb memorial. In French, *paon* means 'peacock', which suggests that Paon was a vain man who liked dressing in brightly coloured, fashionable clothes, possibly in order to impress the ladies. However, in the form *pion*, it means 'usher', a term that may be descriptive of Paon's duties at court.

John of Gaunt's epitaph states that Katherine came from 'a knightly

family', and Paon's knighthood is attested to by several sources, although we do not know when he received the accolade. In 1349, he is even referred to as a lord, and his daughter Elizabeth as 'noble', which reflects his landed status and probably his links to aristocratic blood. This is also evident in his ability to place his children with royalty, which suggests — in the case of his daughters at least - that there was the prospect of some inheritance that would ensure they made good marriages. We know Paon held land in Hainault, because in 1411, his grandson, Sir Thomas Swynford, Katherine's son, was to pursue his claim to lands he had inherited there from his mother. Paon is unlikely, however, to have owned a large estate and was probably not a wealthy man since he was to rely heavily on royal patronage to provide for his children's future.

Paon had first come to England in December 1327 in the train of Philippa of Hainault, who married the young King Edward III on 24 January 1328 in York Minster. Paon perhaps served as Philippa's usher, and may have been present in that capacity at the royal wedding, which took place in the as yet unroofed minster in the midst of a snowstorm.

After Philippa's nuptial celebrations had ended, nearly all her Hainaulter servants were sent home. Apart from a handful of ladies, only Paon de Roët and Walter de Mauney, her carving squire, are known to have been allowed to remain in her retinue, a mark of signal royal favour, which suggests that Paon was highly regarded by both the young King and Queen, and was perhaps a kinsman of Philippa, possibly through their shared ancestry.

That kinship may also have been established, or reinforced, through marriage. No one has as yet successfully identified Katherine's mother, for the name of Paon's wife is not recorded in contemporary documents. The slender evidence we have suggests he perhaps married more than once, that his first marriage took place before c.1335, and that his four known children, who were born over a period of about fifteen years or more, may have been two sets of half-siblings; in which case, Katherine was the child of a second wife, whom he possibly married in the mid-late 1340s. We know he maintained links with Hainault, probably through the good offices of Queen Philippa and other members of her House, so it may be that at least one of his wives was a Hainaulter.

It is also possible that Katherine's mother herself was related to the ruling family of Hainault, and while this theory cannot be proved, it is

credible in many respects. If Paon was linked by marriage, as well as by blood, to Queen Philippa, that would further explain his continuing links with the House of Avesnes and the trust in which he and his family were held by the ruling families of England and Hainault. It would explain too why all his children received royal patronage and why Queen Philippa took such an interest in them; and it was possibly one reason why John of Gaunt may have felt it was appropriate to ultimately marry one of them.

But there is unlikely to have been a close blood tie. If Paon's wife was related to the House of Avesnes, it must have been through a junior branch or connection. Had the kinship been closer, we would expect Paon to have enjoyed more prominence in the courts of England and Hainault. There have, of course, been other unsubstantiated theories as to who Katherine's mother could have been, but this is the most convincing.

Whether Paon was related by marriage to Queen Philippa or not, he was evidently held in high regard by her, and he played his part in the early conflicts of the Hundred Years War, which broke out in 1340 after Edward III claimed the throne of France. For a time, Paon served Queen Philippa as Master of the House, and in 1332, there is a record of her giving money to 'Panetto de Roët de Hanonia'; this is the earliest surviving reference to him. His lost epitaph in Old St Paul's Cathedral describes him as Guienne King of Arms and it may have been through Philippa's influence that he was appointed to this office in c.1334, Guienne being part of the Duchy of Aquitaine and a fief of the English Crown.

By the mid-1340s, Paon was back in Queen Philippa's service as 'one of the chevaliers of the noble and good Queen'. In 1346, he fought at Crecy under Edward III. That same year, 'Sir Panetto de Roët' was present at the siege of Calais, and in August 1347, he was Marshal of the Queen's Household, and one of two of her knights - the other was Sir Walter de Mauney — who were assigned to conduct to her chamber the six burghers who had given themselves up as hostages after Calais fell to Edward III, and whose lives had been spared thanks to the Queen's intercession.

Philippa, however, never courted criticism by indiscriminately promoting her compatriots, and this may explain why Paon, although well thought of and loved by the Queen because he was her countryman,²⁸ never came to greater prominence at the English court and why he eventually sought preferment elsewhere.

By 1349, the year the Black Death was decimating the population of England and much of Europe, Paon had apparently returned to Hainault. From that year onwards, there are several references to him in the contemporary *Cartulaire des Comtes de Hainaut*, the official record of service of the counts of Hainault.³⁰ The first reference concerns a 'noble adolescent, Elizabeth de Roët, daughter of my lord Gilles, called Paonnet, de Roët', who, some time after 27 July 1349, was nominated as a prebendary, or honorary canoness (*chanoinness*), of the chapter of the Abbey of St Waudru in Mons by Queen Philippa's elder sister, Margaret, sovereign Countess of Hainault and Empress of Germany. The choice of a convent in Mons, so close to the former Roelx estates, reinforces the theory that Paon was connected to that family and that his lands were located in this area.

Girls were not normally accepted into the novitiate before the age of thirteen, so Elizabeth de Roët, who was described as being 'adolescent' at the time of her placement, was probably born around 1335-6 at the latest. St Waudru's was a prestigious and influential abbey, and it was an honour for a girl to be so placed by the Countess Margaret; it further demonstrates the close ties between the Roëts and the ruling family of Hainault, and suggests yet again a familial link between them. It was unusual for the eldest girl of a gentle family to enter the cloister, but given the fact that Paon's daughters were both to offer their own daughters as nuns, we might conclude that giving a female child to God was a Roët family custom.

Payn also had a son, Walter de Roët, who was possibly named after Sir Walter de Mauney, and who, in 1355 was in the service, in turn, of the Countess Margaret and her son, Duke Albert, and Edward III's eldest son and heir, Edward of Woodstock, Prince of Wales, popularly known to history as 'the Black Prince'. As Walter was a Yeoman of the Chamber to the Prince in 1355, and probably fought under his command at Poitiers in 1356, he is likely to have been born around 1338-40 at the latest.

Between 1350 and 1352, there are seven references to Paon in the *Cartulaire des Comtes de Hainaut*. For example, on 11 May 1350, he is recorded as preparing to accompany the Countess. Margaret's sons, Duke Albert, Duke William and Duke Otto, on a pilgrimage to the church of St Martin at Sebourg near Valenciennes to make their devotions at the shrine of the twelfth-century hermit, St Druon. It was probably in that year that Paon's famous daughter was born.

It was C. L. Kingsford, in his article on Katherine Swynford in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, who suggested that she was born in 1350. There is no contemporary record of her date of birth, but given that the minimum canonical age at which a girl could be married and have marital intercourse was twelve, and that Katherine probably married around 1362—3 and had her first child in c. 1363-4, then a date of 1350 is feasible, although of course she could have been born a little earlier. The twenty-fifth of November is the feast day of St Katherine, so it is possible that Paon's second daughter was named for the patron saint on whose anniversary she was born, and for whom she was to express great devotion and reverence.

In the Middle Ages, St Katherine of Alexandria was one of the most popular of female saints. Edward III and Philippa of Hainault had a special devotion to her; their accounts show that Katherine wheels, the symbol of her martyrdom, adorned counterpanes on the royal beds, jousting apparel and other garments. Like other English mediaeval queens, Philippa was patroness of the royal hospital of St Katherine-by-the-Tower in London, which had recently been rebuilt under her auspices, and with which Katherine Swynford herself would one day be associated.

St Katherine had probably never even existed. There is no record of her in antiquity, and her cult did not emerge until the ninth century. She was said to have been of patrician or even royal birth, beautiful, rich, respected and learned. Her studies led her to convert to Christianity at a time when Christians were being persecuted in the Roman Empire, and she dared to publicly protest to the Emperor Maxentius (reigned AD 306-12) against the worship of pagan idols and the persecution itself. Maxentius was greatly impressed by her beauty and her courage in adhering to her convictions, and sent fifty of his sages and philosophers to reason with her. When they failed to demolish her arguments, he was so infuriated that he had them all burned alive. He then demanded that Katherine abjure her Christian faith and marry him, but she refused on the grounds that she was a bride of Christ. At this, the Emperor's patience with her gave out, and she was beaten, imprisoned and sentenced to be broken on a spiked wheel that had its two halves rotating in different directions. But just as her agony was about to begin, an angel appeared and smote the wheel with a sword, breaking it in pieces. This miraculous intervention is said to have inspired the mass conversion of two thousand Roman soldiers, whereupon an even more enraged Maxentius had Katherine beheaded. Afterwards, other angels appeared and miraculously carried her remains to Mount Sinai, where a Greek

Orthodox monastery was built to house her shrine. It should be noted that there are many variations on this fantastical tale.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the cult of St Katherine gained momentum. She was revered for her staunch faith, her courage and her blessed virginity, and was believed to have under her special protection young maidens, churchmen, philosophers, students, craftsmen, nurses and the dying. Numerous churches and bells were dedicated to her, and miracle plays were written about her. Her story, and her symbol of a wheel, appeared widely in art, mural paintings, manuscripts, ivory panels, stained glass, embroideries, vestments and heraldry." And many little girls were named in her honour, in the hope that they would emulate her manifold virtues.

That Katherine was Paon de Roët's daughter is not in doubt. The chronicler Jean Froissart, himself a native of Hainault and a servant of Queen Philippa, may well have met Katherine — he certainly took an interest in her - and he states that she was 'the daughter of a knight of Hainault called Sir Paon de Roët, in his day one of the knights of good Queen Philippa of England'.

Paon's fourth child, Philippa, was probably so called in honour of the Queen, who may have been her godmother. It is often claimed that Philippa de Roët was placed in royal service in the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, by 1356, in which case she would have been born in the early 1340s at the latest. However, as will be proposed below, this claim is probably unfounded.

In 1631, John Weever asserted that Katherine was the oldest of Paon's daughters, but this can hardly be the case, as that would make her at least twenty-eight when she married, middle-aged by mediaeval standards; but perhaps Weever knew nothing of Elizabeth de Roët, and had Katherine's other sister Philippa in mind, in which case he was probably correct in saying that Katherine was the elder.

Philippa de Roët was certainly in the Queen's service on 12 September 1366, and was married by then; she was therefore likely to have been born in the early 1350s, and was probably Katherine's younger sister, as Weever implies, rather than the elder of the two, as is usually assumed. Thus Paon appears to have had two older children, Elizabeth and Walter, born between c.1335 and c.1340 at the latest, and two younger daughters, Katherine and Philippa, born around 1350 or later. The long gap between the births of Walter and Katherine suggests that Paon married twice and that each marriage produced

two surviving children.

It is sometimes erroneously stated that Katherine Swynford was born in Picardy, France; this error has arisen from some historians confusing Philippa de Roët with a waiting woman of the Queen called Philippa Picard, but they were in fact two different people, so there was no Roët connection with Picardy. Froissart refers to Katherine as a Hainaulter, and in England she was regarded, by virtue of her birth and descent, as a stranger or alien, the chronicler Henry Knighton calling her 'a certain foreign woman'. We may therefore conclude that she was born in Hainault, probably on her father's lands near Mons. This being the case, the earliest possible date for her birth is 1349.

Katherine was born into a troubled world, and would not long remain in the country of her birth. In 1351, Paon was in the service of the Countess Margaret as the Knight Master of her household, in which capacity he seems to have been responsible for enforcing the observance of protocol. But Margaret's position was by no means secure: in 1350, she had renounced her claims to Holland, Zeeland and Friesland in favour of her second son, William, in the hope of retaining Hainault for herself, but in the spring of 1351, William seized control of it. Several attempts at negotiation failed, and all four counties became embroiled in the conflict. When Margaret was forced to flee from Zeeland and take refuge in Hainault, her followers were exiled, their castles destroyed and their property and offices redistributed. Paon must have been caught up in this political maelstrom, and may temporarily have found himself faced with ruin.

In December 1351, hoping to enlist the support of Edward III, Margaret fled to England with her household, taking Paon with her. Given the uncertainty of any future in Hainault, he is likely to have brought with him his children, Walter, Katherine and possibly Philippa, and indeed his wife, if she was still alive. Elizabeth, of course, was left behind in her convent; it is doubtful if Katherine ever knew her elder sister.

A settlement was quickly reached between Margaret and her son, whereby Margaret was to keep Hainault, and early in 1352, William came to England to be married to King Edward's cousin, Matilda (or Maud) of Lancaster. In March, when the Hainault royals returned home, Paon was with them, but after August 1352, he disappears from contemporary sources entirely. His date of death is nowhere recorded, and we know only that he was buried in Old St Paul's Cathedral in London, where a memorial inscription to him was put in

place after 1396. In 1631, in his *Ancient Funerary Monuments*, John Weever described Paon's sepulchre, which was 'in this cathedral church, and near unto Sir John Beauchamp's tomb, upon a fair marble stone, inlaid all over with brass (of which nothing but the heads of a few brazen nails are at this day visible) and engraven with the representation and coat [of] arms of the party defunct. Thus much of a mangled funeral inscription was of late time perspicuous to be read, as followeth: *Hic jacet Paganus Roët miles Guyenne Rex Armorum Pater Catherine Ducisse Lancastriae*' ('Here lies Paon Roët, soldier, Guienne King of Arms, father of Catherine, Duchess of Lancaster').

The likelihood is that Katherine herself commissioned this tomb and memorial for her father. Weever's description suggests that the tomb was of great antiquity in 1631, and the use of Katherine's title without anything to qualify it (such as 'late Duchess') implies that it was executed in her lifetime, which would date the tomb to the period 1396-1403. The question is, did Paon survive until then? It is just possible, but not at all probable in those days, that he lived well into his nineties, and witnessed Katherine's ultimate triumph. What makes his survival improbable, though, is the complete absence of references to him in contemporary records after 1352, although of course he may have continued to serve the Countess Margaret until her death in 1356 and then retired to his modest holdings in Hainault. No Inquisition Post Mortem has been found for him, which suggests that he did not die in England. The most likely conclusion is that he died long before 1396, possibly even as early as 1352, but more probably in 1355, as is suggested below, that he was buried either in St Paul's - which in itself would underline his importance and the honour and esteem in which he had been held by the royal families of England and Hainault - or elsewhere, and that after 1396, Katherine or John of Gaunt perhaps had his remains translated to St Paul's, or simply placed a new memorial over his resting place, wanting his memory to be invested with her own greatness.

When Paon left England in 1352, he probably took his teenaged son Walter back to Hainault with him and left his tiny daughters in the care of the kindly Queen Philippa. It was then customary for gently born children to be placed in noble households with patrons who could provide an appropriate education and advance their prospects of preferment and an advantageous marriage, but these little girls were mere infants at this time, both too small to serve the Queen in any way. Paon's placing them with her so young suggests that they were already motherless, their mother perhaps having died in childbirth. The likelihood is that Philippa offered or agreed to make them her

wards, educate them and find them husbands, and that a relieved Paon left them with her, secure in the knowledge that the Queen's patronage would be to his daughters' lasting benefit.

This early placement of Katherine de Roët in the Queen's household is corroborated by Froissart's statement that she was continuously brought up from her youth in princely courts, and by a reference in *John of Gaunt's Register* to Katherine's nurse, Agnes Bonsergeant, who doubtless was appointed by the Queen to care for her.

Early in 1355, we find Walter de Roët in the service of the Countess Margaret at Mons; by May, he was in England, having been appointed a Yeoman of the Chamber to the Black Prince, Queen Philippa's eldest son. We might infer from this that Paon had died early in 1355, and that the Countess at once sent Walter to Queen Philippa, who was caring for his sisters and who quickly arranged for him to join her son's household. Had the girls' mother still been alive in 1352, they would probably have returned to Hainault with their father, in which case there would have been no reason for the Countess Margaret to send all three children to England; she had, after all, placed their elder sister Elizabeth in a convent in Mons, and could surely have made provision for the three younger siblings herself. Thus the evidence suggests that their mother was dead by 1352, and that Katherine and Philippa were placed with the Queen that year and were already in England in 1355, when their father probably died. Thus Katherine would hardly have known her father, still less her mother.

Katherine and Philippa were fortunate indeed to be taken into the care of the motherly Philippa of Hainault, a 'full noble and good woman'⁴ who had borne twelve children of her own — the youngest, Thomas of Woodstock, had been born as recently as January 1355 — and had undertaken the upbringing of several other nobly or royally born children. The Queen was now about forty-four, a tall, plump, kindly lady who was wonderfully generous, wise, 'gladsome, humbly pious' and greatly loved and respected.⁴⁵ She was interested in education, art and literature, and her charities were legion. At the same time, she was inordinately fond of rich adornment—'blessed be the memory of King Edward III and Philippa of Hainault, his Queen, who first invented clothes', observed one chronicler caustically - and she maintained a large and very costly household. As a result, her income did not meet the demands made on it, which resulted in complaints in Parliament about her frequently getting into debt, and ultimately obliged the King to amalgamate her establishment with his own. Yet Philippa made a great contribution to the stability and success of the

monarchy," with her genius for fostering a degree of family unity and closeness that was unique in the history of the Plantagenet dynasty. Her large brood all adored her, as did her husband the King (whose pet name for her was 'mine biddiny') and those children who were fortunate enough to be fostered by her. Jean Froissart, Philippa's countryman, called her 'the good Queen, that so many good deeds had done in her time, and so many knights succoured', and ladies and damsels comforted'.

Although it was the normal practice for well-born little girls to spend some of their formative years in a convent, where they received an education of sorts and were taught good behaviour and household skills, there is no evidence that Katherine was ever in a convent; on the contrary, we have Froissart's evidence that she was continuously brought up from her youth in princely courts — starting, of course, in the Queen's household. The fact that Philippa spoke Dutch as well as French - two languages with which the young Katherine and her sister would surely have been familiar — must initially have been a great help to both girls. Doubtless Katherine quickly learned to speak Norman French, the official language of the English court, a much-corrupted version of the Norman dialect spoken by William the Conqueror and his companions, and somewhat different from the French spoken on the Continent. However, in her own lifetime, Katherine would see Norman French overtaken by English as the language of the law courts (1362), Parliament (1363) and fashionable literary circles, although it remained in use by the nobility for letters and everyday converse until well into the first half of the fifteenth century.

Katherine herself must have learned English too; her long tenure as lady of the manor of Kettlethorpe, and the fact that her brother-in-law, Chaucer, wrote his great works in the vernacular, make this more than likely.

In the Queen's Chamber (i.e. her household), Katherine and her sister would not have lacked for company of their own age. The younger princesses - Mary, born in 1344, and Margaret, born in 1346, would have been among their companions. Margaret married in 1359, Mary in 1361, but both sadly died in the winter of 1361-2. The other surviving princes and princesses — Edward, the Black Prince, born 1330, Isabella of Woodstock, born 1332, Lionel of Antwerp, born 1338, John of Gaunt, born 1340, and Edmund of Langley, born 1341 — were much older, and had long left the nursery. Froissart says that Katherine was 'brought up in her youth' with Blanche of Lancaster, a

cousin of the King and the future wife of John of Gaunt. Blanche was eight years older than Katherine, and did spend some of her formative years in the care of Queen Philippa;⁴⁷ there is later evidence to show that she and Katherine came to be fond of each other. Living in the Queen's household, Katherine would have come to know all the members of the royal family well, including John of Gaunt, who had an affair with Marie de St Hilaire, one of his mother's ladies, probably in the mid to late 1350s, and later on doubtless came frequently to the Queen's apartments to pay court to Blanche, his future bride.

Katherine grew up to be 'a woman of such bringing up and honourable demeanour', and in this the influence of Queen Philippa can easily be detected. Although Katherine was a gentlewoman, she had not been born into the highest echelons of society, but the education she received in the Queen's household formed her into a lady of many accomplishments who was able to mingle seamlessly with the elite of the kingdom. She must have been well educated and sophisticated; the fact that, at the age of only about twenty-three, she would be appointed governess to John of Gaunt's two eldest daughters, who grew up to be highly cultivated and charming women, testifies to this, as do the intellectual interests of at least two of her own children, Henry and Joan Beaufort. Katherine's upbringing in the Queen's household would have qualified her uniquely for the post of governess.

From an early age, Katherine displayed a certain piety, which was perhaps in part due to Queen Philippa's early training. The Queen was also a practical woman, and it was doubtless from her that Katherine learned the skills of household management that prepared her efficiently to run the knightly estates that were entrusted to her care and to understand the functioning of the ducal establishments of John of Gaunt. And she must have learned from Philippa of Hainault the generosity of heart and tactful diplomacy that later enabled her to draw together the diverse strands of what otherwise might have proved a highly dysfunctional family.

Katherine's character and outlook on life would have been shaped by her spending her formative years in the privileged world of the English court. It was a brilliant but itinerant court, and she would find herself moving from place to place, lodging in turn at Windsor Castle, Westminster Palace, Woodstock Palace, Havering-atte-Bower and a number of other luxurious residences of the King and Queen. The court attracted people of rank, intellect and sophisticated tastes, and was a centre of learning and culture. Its members were wealthy,

privileged and overwhelmingly preoccupied with the securing of patronage and the acquisition of material luxuries. Display was what mattered: they dined in style on rich and novel cuisine, drank to excess, and dressed in extravagantly fashionable and colourful clothes; women's necklines were very low and often left the shoulders and breasts half-bared, while young men wore such clinging hose beneath their short jackets (paltocks) that little was left to the imagination. Elaborate headgear, shoes with long pointed toes, trailing sleeves and belts clasped seductively low on the hips completed these ensembles for both sexes, and a profusion of jewellery was de rigueur. Unsurprisingly, these pampered, gaudily attired courtiers shocked the King's more sober subjects, not only by their revealing dress but also by their sometimes licentious conduct. All, however, could be redeemed by the exercise of good manners.

Katherine would have learned early on the strict codes of protocol and formal courtesy that were observed by royalty and the aristocracy: Froissart tells us that 'she had a perfect knowledge of court etiquette, because she had been brought up in it continually since her youth'. Doubtless she was also taught something of the accomplishments deemed desirable in a court into which Queen Philippa had introduced many more women than had graced it in previous reigns, and hence injected a somewhat civilising influence on what was essentially a male-dominated, militaristic society. Katherine would have learned dancing, embroidery, riding, hunting, hawking and social skills. That she was a competent horsewoman is evident from the fact that she would one day ride beside John of Gaunt on a progress through his estates, and later still kept a dozen of her horses in his stables.

She would have become familiar with the parlour games so beloved of courtiers, the songs and music performed by the King's musicians, and with the cult of courtly love, which informed and underpinned sexual relationships within the rarefied world of castle or palace; its idealised code permitted bachelors of usually inferior rank to pay their passionate addresses to great ladies who were often married and theoretically unattainable. In practice, it facilitated adulterous relationships. Yet its emphasis on the lover posing as a devoted servant to his mistress, or wearing her favour at a tournament, or languishing hopelessly in the face of her disdain, set the tone for social interaction between men and women, and its influence on sexual behaviour in the western world is still evident today. Needless to say, courtly love had little to do with the hard-headed mediaeval approach to marriage, which among the landed classes was essentially

a business contract made for material, political or dynastic advantage, gave full control of a wife to her husband, and took no account of love or personal inclinations.

But it was of love that the courtiers talked, sang and composed verse — love and martial exploits. The latter were a favourite topic of discussion in a court predominantly inhabited by a martial aristocracy and a multitude of knights. For the ladies, however, love was of paramount interest. Manuscripts of romances and love poems were always in circulation in female circles at court, and Katherine, under the guidance of her royal patroness, would surely have been taught to read, if not to write, so that she could participate fully in the social milieu of which she was to be a part for so much of her life.

Katherine's daughter, Joan Beaufort, and both her future royal charges were literate, as were many of the women in her social circle, so it is inconceivable that Katherine herself was unable to read, if not write.

The game and play of love was all very well, but it would have been drummed into growing girls like Katherine that they must wait to be addressed before speaking, must keep their eyes modestly lowered and their hands folded, and that they must avoid being over-familiar with men if they wanted to avoid scandal. But the court was a licentious place where promiscuity was rampant, since so many young men could not afford to marry, and frank, bawdy tales (such as those of Giovanni Boccaccio and, later, Geoffrey Chaucer) were very popular; Chaucer, in 'The Squire's Tale', speaks of the revels, jollity and 'dancings' that provided opportunities for erotic intrigue, 'when each person fully experiences the being of another'. In such an environment, young people could hardly have grown up ignorant of the facts of life, or its temptations.

The social and moral tone of the English court was set by King Edward III himself, who could be described as the archetypal mediaeval monarch: chivalrous, warlike and accomplished in statecraft and diplomacy. Born in 1312, Edward had succeeded to the throne in 1327. His contemporaries admired him immensely: This King Edward was of infinite goodness and glorious among all the great ones of the world. He was great-hearted, clement and benign, familiar and gentle to all men; affable and gentle in courtesy of speech, and profuse in largesse. His body was comely, and his face like the face of a god. He was liberal in giving and lavish in spending. Like his wife, he dressed lavishly, ever the showman.

By the time Katherine came to court, Edward's subjects 'thought that a

new sun was rising over England, with peace abounding, the wealth of possessions and the glory of victory'.⁵ In prosecuting his claim to the French throne, the King had inflicted resounding defeats on England's ancient enemy at Sluys in 1340, Crecy in 1346 and Calais in 1347, and won high renown, a substantial foothold in France and international prestige for his kingdom. 'He was the flower of this world's knighthood, for whom to do battle was to reign, to contend was to triumph,' observed the chronicler Henry Knighton admiringly.

Edward had created a lavish and extravagant court that was a centre of chivalry and culture. In 1348, he had founded the celebrated Order of the Garter in honour of England's patron saint St George, and in emulation of King Arthur and his legendary knights. The annual feast of St George, which was celebrated each April at Windsor, was one of the greatest social occasions of the year, ranked with the Easter and Christmas festivities. Edward had also established a pattern of court ceremonial that underlined his majesty, proclaimed his magnificence and provided his courtiers and subjects with an endless procession of fascinating spectacles.

King Edward was devoted to Queen Philippa, and they were to enjoy a long and happy marriage. Yet he was not faithful to her: indeed, he was often 'passionately smitten'⁵² with the charms of other ladies, and there was even an unsubstantiated tale that he took what he wanted by force. At the dances, hunts, tournaments and feasts that were a regular feature of court life, he was often to be found 'entertaining ladies'. In other respects, he was a loving husband, and a good and affectionate father who was clearly indulgent towards his large brood. By marrying his sons to English heiresses, he secured lands and tides for them without impoverishing himself, and in the process identified the interests of the nobility with those of the royal family. That there was remarkable harmony within that family was due to this careful policy of the King and the warmly unifying influence of the Queen. Thus Edward III could count on his sons' unquestioning loyalty and support, which was rare in the history of the mediaeval English monarchy.

Katherine grew up in the rarefied and privileged enclave of the court, but there was a wider world that also played its part in shaping her. She lived in a society that faced similar problems to those we face today, a post-imperial world in which people were fast losing faith in an authoritarian government that seemed unable or unwilling to deal effectively with the practical problems it faced, and which insisted on pursuing victory at all costs in a war that could never be won. A world

suffering from the effects of rampant monetary inflation, a terrible increase in lawlessness, a decline in morality and the rise of muscular mercantile organisations whose power was equal to that of today's multinational corporations. A world in which people suffered under unjust increases in taxation; in which the rich experienced the breaking up of great estates, and the working classes were increasingly flexing their political muscles. A world in which religious fundamentalism was challenged by a society grown disillusioned with organised religion. And a world that, at the same time, witnessed an improvement in standards of living and the unprecedented growth of a consumer culture.

Yet in many other respects, Katherine's world would be largely unrecognisable to us today. In the second half of the fourteenth century, England was still essentially a feudal society, with a social hierarchy that represented mediaeval man's preoccupation with the divinely appointed order of civilisation. At the very top of this pyramid was the King; next came his tenants-in-chief, the great barons; then came the knightly classes and the gentry - the class to which Katherine belonged — then the freemen and rising merchant classes, and at the very bottom of the pyramid, the villeins or serfs, peasants who were tied to their manors and worked the land for their lords and themselves.

Feudalism had evolved in the Dark Ages in the insecure landscape of western Europe, when territorial borders were constantly changing or under threat, wars were endemic and kings had to rely on a military aristocracy that could supply them with armies, while peasants needed the protection that only an overlord, with his strong castle or fortified manor, and his train of knights, could provide. However, in England, by the thirteenth century, a strong centralised government and increasing material prosperity had led to the growth of towns, trade and commerce and a population boom.

All this was to change, however, just before Katherine was born. In 1348—9, the Black Death, a particularly virulent form of bubonic plague, scythed its way across Europe killing between two fifths and three quarters of the population. In his *Decameron* (1358), Giovanni Boccaccio described the dreaded symptoms: 'It first betrayed itself by the emergence of certain tumours in the groin or arm-pits, some of which grew as large as an apple, after which the form of the malady began to change, black spots making their appearance in many cases on the arm or the thigh.' Both the tumours and the spots were 'infallible tokens of approaching death' that could overtake the victim

within hours. Spread by rats, 'the fearful mortality rolled on, following the course of the sun into every part of the kingdom', wrote the English chronicler Henry Knighton. Few souls remained untouched by it.

The Black Death left the world a very different place. Its impact was felt in every walk of life. Because it was seen as the judgement of God on a sinful universe, religious hysteria and fanaticism flourished and people began to question the old certainties of the universal faith preached by the Roman Catholic Church. Yet while acts of sacrilege became more commonplace, mysticism - with its emphasis on man's striving to attain unity with God — began to thrive, as people sought to find some meaning to the horrific mortality and a deeper understanding of the mysteries of faith. When Margery Kempe — an English mystic who was once the guest of Katherine's daughter, Joan Beaufort — had a vision of the suffering Christ 'all rent and torn with scourges, rivers of blood flowing out plenteously from every limb, she fell down and cried, twisting and turning her body amazingly, and could not keep herself from crying because of the fire of love that burned so fervently in her soul with pure pity and compassion'.

This obsession with death and suffering revealed itself in literature, poetry, art, and particularly in sculpture, with the appearance of cadaver tombs with an effigy of the deceased in life above, and another depicting his or her rotting corpse below — a grisly reminder of the end of all flesh. This was the cultural atmosphere in which the young Katherine spent her growing years.

Decomposing bodies must have been a common sight during the plague years, for often there was no one left alive to bury the dead. According to the Rochester chronicler, William Dene, 'the plague carried off' so vast a multitude of people that nobody could be found who would bear the corpses to the grave. Men and women carried their dead children and threw them into the common burial pits, the stench from which was so appalling that scarcely anyone dared to walk beside them.' Sometimes there was no one to perform the funerary rites, since so many priests had died. Whole villages succumbed to the pestilence, and their buildings were left to decay and disappear. Law enforcement collapsed, and there was a sharp decline in public morality, as many poor mortals — aware that death was stalking them - made the most of the time that was left to them, committing theft, murder and fornication unchecked by State or Church.

Never again would the social hierarchy be as stable. In the years following the Black Death, it became clear that feudalism was crumbling. A severe shortage of manpower on the manors and farms meant that the services of the remaining peasants were in high demand by the landed classes, and that they could demand good wages for those services. This sounded the death-knell of feudalism, for no man wanted to remain in bond to his lord when he could benefit from the free market the plague had created, and lords would find they had little choice but to release their serfs from villeinage and pay for their services, knowing they would otherwise just abscond and sell their labour elsewhere. In England, Parliament intervened to reverse this trend, passing in 1351 the Statute of Labourers, which tried to impose maximum wages and minimum prices. 'Many workmen and servants,' it complained, 'will not serve unless they receive excessive wages, and some are rather willing to beg in idleness than labour to get their living.' Hence every villein 'shall serve the master requiring him or her'. But it was too late: the tide of change had turned too far, and the law proved unenforceable. 'The world goeth from bad to worse,' grumbled the poet John Gower in 1375. 'Labour is now at so high a price that he who will order his business aright must pay five or six shillings now for what cost two in former times.' The late fourteenth century witnessed the emergence of the hired hand and the yeoman farmer who owned his own land. Of course, this process of change did not happen overnight, but it was prevalent throughout Katherine Swynford's lifetime and beyond.

As capitalism gradually replaced feudalism, trade expanded and the middle classes came to enjoy ever greater prosperity and influence. Katherine's own sister married into a rich merchant family, and that sister's son rose to great political and social prominence, while her granddaughter became a duchess. In Parliament, founded in the thirteenth century in the aftermath of the wars between Crown and barons, the Commons increasingly made their voices heard, much to the dismay of conservative lords like John of Gaunt, who were determined to resist the relentless changes brought about by the new social order.

Katherine lived in an England that was largely rural, with a population of perhaps three million souls and an economy based on farming, wool and overseas trade. It was not an industrial society — that came centuries later — and most people lived in tight communities in villages or on manors, in crude wattle-and-daub cottages. Katherine herself spent many years as a lady of the manor, responsible for a farming community. Commerce was centred upon

the towns, which were far smaller than they are today: London housed around 23,000 inhabitants in 1377, although it boasted a hundred churches. Even York, the second most important city and the virtual capital of the North, had a population of only 7,500 at most. Towns were where prosperous burgesses lived, and guilds of craftsmen controlled trade, but they were often crowded and dirty, with buildings and people crammed into narrow streets with over-jutting upper storeys within walls that prevented expansion. In 1419, the City of London authorities ordered that each citizen 'shall make clean of filth the front of his house under penalty of half a mark' GC73) and that 'no one shall throw dung into the King's highway or before the house of his neighbour'. In an age of poor sanitation, in which people relied on horses as the fastest and most efficient form of travel, the nuisance of dung and human waste was an ever-recurring concern.

In the towns, one could find all kinds of commodities on sale in the shops. When the poet John Lydgate walked through London in the early fifteenth century, he was offered 'hot peascods [peas in the pod] and sheep's feet, strawberries ripe', spices, pepper, velvet, silk, lawn, mackerel, green rushes to strew on the floor, a hood, 'ribs of beef and many a pie', pewter pots, harps, pipes and plenty of 'stolen goods'. It was hardly surprising that towns and cities needed to expand, and with the country largely at peace, suburbs were beginning to emerge, as people built houses beyond the safety of the walls, with gardens and orchards. Katherine Swynford had strong links with the important city of Lincoln — population 3,400 — and was fortunate enough to rent, at different times, two very imposing houses in its exclusive cathedral close.

Outside the towns and cities, the countryside was quiet and peaceful. The land was mostly fertile, but farming was still based on the three-field system, with crops being rotated and one field being left fallow each year. Farm animals were regularly slaughtered in the autumn, and their meat salted down or smoked for winter consumption. Any surplus farm produce was sold locally or taken to the markets held regularly, by royal charter, in the cities and towns.

'The riches of England,' wrote an Italian traveller in the fifteenth century, 'are greater than those of any other country in Europe. This is owing in the first place to the great fertility of the soil, which is such that, with the exception of wine, they import nothing from abroad for their subsistence.' Other foreigners waxed lyrical about the beauty of rural England, its lush green pastures, rolling hills and pretty stone or timbered dwellings, its towering castles and moated manor houses.

The contents of a well-set-up knightly household — as listed in a will of 1410 — might comprise a canopied — or 'tester' — bed, covers, blankets, linens, coverlets, mattresses, painted cloths, rugs, napkins, towels, washbasins, candelabra of bronze, marble and silver-gilt, bronze pots and pans, twelve silver spoons, spits, poles, iron pots, vessels of silver-gilt and lead for beer, silver-gilt salt cellars, three iron braziers, trestles and boards for tables'. Furniture itself was sparse, and might also have included cupboards, buffets and stools. These are the kind of household goods that Katherine Swynford would have owned for much of her married life.

England was known as 'the ringing isle' because of the constant pealing of bells from numerous parish churches and abbeys. In the cities, the spires of the great cathedrals soared heavenwards, drawing the focus of humanity towards God, who was an ever-constant presence in people's lives.

The power and influence of the mediaeval Church was all-encompassing. Today, in our materialistic and secular society, it is hard for us to comprehend how large a part religion played in the lives of mediaeval men and women. Religion underpinned all aspects of political life. The sacraments of the Church marked every human rite of passage from birth to death. The rituals of the Mass and the divine offices set the timetable for daily life. Holidays were the holy days of the Church, the great feasts of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, and numerous saints' days or feast days. If people made long journeys — which was not always easy, as the roads were generally poor and often badly maintained — it was usually to go on pilgrimage to the many saints' shrines to be found in England, such as St Thomas of Canterbury or Our Lady of Walsingham; a few even got as far as Rome, Compostela or Jerusalem. 'People long to go on pilgrimages, and palmers long to seek the stranger strands of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,' observed Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*.

A good Christian was expected to go to confession at least three times a year, and would regularly pray to the Virgin Mary or to his or her favourite saints to intercede on his behalf with a stern, loving but sometimes vengeful deity; people talked about the saints as familiarly as if they were members of their own circle. The Church was also the final arbiter of public morals, and contravening its doctrines or decrees could lead to charges of heresy, for heresy was interpreted as anything that deviated from, or challenged, the divinely appointed order of Christendom and the tenets of the Roman Church.

Mediaeval English churches were much more colourful places than they appear today, since much of their decoration, stained glass and statuary was destroyed during the Reformation of the sixteenth century. In Katherine's day, brilliant paintings adorned the walls, ceilings and pillars in churches, put there to instruct a largely illiterate populace in biblical stories or the lives of the saints; and such visual aids to spiritual understanding were often necessary, since all services were conducted in Latin, the language of the universal Church. Many churches had a doom painting, depicting Christ in majesty judging souls and sending the righteous to Heaven and the sinful to Hell, the latter being depicted in stark, gruesome detail in order to bring the wicked to repentance. Besides paintings, there were statues of the saints as aids to devotion, and invariably a rood, a large wooden carving of Christ on the Cross, which was hung high on a screen at the entrance to the chancel.

Many men and women, including Katherine's sister and daughter, devoted their lives to God. They entered the priesthood, or withdrew from the world into monasteries or convents, where they carried out the *Opus Dei*, the work of the Lord, through prayer, manual labour and the preservation of written knowledge and works of faith, history and literature in illuminated manuscripts.

The religious houses, of which there were nearly seven hundred in England, also provided practical services for the community at large: they ran schools, hospitals or infirmaries, and guest houses for travellers. They offered work for lay people. They succoured the aged, the infirm and the destitute, providing food and shelter for beggars and the homeless. Wealthy people with pious aspirations would endow abbeys and priories with money, annuities and gifts, or found chantries or colleges of priests, so that their souls could be prayed for after death, and their passage through Purgatory, that hellish preparation for Heaven in which venial sins were expurgated, could be eased. Katherine Swynford lies today in the chantry chapel that was founded for the salvation of her soul.

Of course, many of the Church's practices were open to abuse. The sale of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins, the worldly luxury of many clergy and religious houses, the perceived immorality of those in holy orders - all were commonplaces of fourteenth-century life, and the focus of increasing concern on the part of a growing number of radical freethinkers. The poet William Langland, in *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (c.1376) wrote of hermits on their way to Walsingham 'with their wenches following after', friars 'preaching to the people for what

they could get, interpreting the Scriptures to suit themselves and their patrons', doctors of divinity 'dressing as handsomely as they please, now that Charity has gone into business', priests who sought to 'traffic in masses and chime their voices to the sweet jingling of silver', pardoners 'claiming to have power to absolve all the people from vows of every kind', and bishops who shut their ears to what was going on around them. Above all, the 'Babylonish captivity' of the Papacy from 1309 at 'the sinful city of Avignon', a papacy that was in thrall to the powerful kings of France, brought the Roman Catholic Church into disrepute throughout Christendom and weakened its moral authority. Not for nothing has John Wycliffe — a courageous and highly controversial priest who spoke out against the corruption in the Church and who enjoyed John of Gaunt's patronage — been called 'the morning star of the Reformation'.

Alongside the Church, the State, in the form of the King, the lords in council, Parliament and the administration, governed the lives of the population. The King, whose sovereignty had the almost supernatural authority of a crowned priest, was responsible for maintaining the peace of his realm, for defending it from invasion, and for administering justice to all in the form of good laws.

In the fourteenth century, England was ruled by the Plantagenets, a dynasty of generally vigorous and able monarchs who had kept a largely unbroken grip on their realm since 1154, when the dynamic Henry II had succeeded to the throne. The name Plantagenet derives from the nickname given to Henry II's father, Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, who habitually wore a broom flower - *planta genista* — in his hat. The name was not actually used as a royal surname until the fifteenth century.

Henry II had married Eleanor of Aquitaine, the greatest heiress in Europe, and through her had acquired the rich Duchy of Aquitaine and the County of Poitou; he already held the Duchy of Normandy, which he had inherited from his great-grandfather, William the Conqueror, who had established his Norman dynasty in England in 1066; and he was Count of Anjou, which he had inherited from his father. Thus he was master of all the land from the Scottish border to the Pyrenees. But Henry's great empire did not long survive him. The ineptitude of his son, King John, and the aggressive determination of successive French monarchs to gain control of the Plantagenet dominions, resulted in the loss of Normandy and Anjou, and by the fourteenth century, England's territory in France consisted of a couple of northern towns and a much-reduced Duchy of Aquitaine that

centred largely upon Bordeaux, Gascony and parts of the Dordogne region.

As we will see, it was Edward III, who succeeded to the throne in 1327 and to whose court Katherine came nearly thirty years later, who had the audacity to claim the throne of France itself, which he insisted was his in right of his mother, Isabella, the sister of the last surviving kings of the House of Capet. But the French had no desire to see an Englishman on their throne, for England and France had long been traditional enemies, and they chose a member of the royal House of Valois as their monarch. Thus began a war that famously was to last for a hundred years, a war that would have a profound effect, not only in western Europe, but also on the life of Katherine Swynford herself.

By May 1355, as has been noted, Katherine's brother, Walter de Roët, had joined the Black Prince's household as a yeoman of the Chamber. This was a brilliant opportunity for a young man, as the Prince enjoyed an international reputation as a chivalric hero and warrior that was second to none. He was 'the comfort of England', 'the flower of chivalry of all the world', and 'for as long as he lived and flourished, his good fortune in battle, like that of a second Hector, was feared by all races'. Already, at twenty-five, he was a legend.

Born in 1330, the sixteen-year-old Edward of Woodstock had won his spurs in 1346 at the Battle of Crecy, in which he 'magnificently performed' astounding feats of arms. He was 'fair, lusty and well-formed', brave, intelligent, charismatic and inspirational. His sixteenth-century nickname - it is not known to have been used earlier - probably derived from the black armour he is said to have worn, but it could equally well have described his vicious and much-feared temper. He could be — it has to be said - impatient, arrogant, and capable of great cruelty.

The Prince's household provided an environment in which any aspiring young man would have been gratified to be placed. He spent lavishly on his residences, notably his palace at Kennington in Surrey, and lived in great splendour and luxury. He loved tournaments, hunting, gambling and women, and fathered at least four bastards. His admiring contemporaries, whose priorities were those of the fourteenth century and not the twenty-first, regarded him as the epitome of knighthood.

Before 9 May 1355, the Black Prince arranged for two of his retainers,

Walter de Roët and Sir Eustace d'Aubrecicourt, to deliver letters to his aunt, the Countess Margaret, in Hainault, and to one of her clerks, Stephen Maulyons, provost of the church of Mons. Maulyons owed the Prince £40, but Edward ordered him to divide it equally and pay it 'as a gift' to Walter and Sir Eustace; £10 was a munificent sum - today it would be worth ,£7,800 - so Walter was clearly highly regarded by his employer. The Prince gave Walter forty shillings (about £780) for his travelling expenses on 10 May, so either a long trip was anticipated — you could never be sure how long a Channel crossing might take — or Walter was to travel in some comfort. By September, Walter had returned from his mission, for that month he accompanied the Black Prince, now King's Lieutenant in Aquitaine, on a military expedition to the Duchy, and he may well have fought under the Prince in 1356 when Edward won a great victory over the French at the Battle of Poitiers and captured John II, King of France himself, thus further enhancing his dazzling reputation. It is possible that Walter was killed at Poitiers, because no more is heard of him. In 1411, Katherine's son, Sir Thomas Swynford, laid claim to lands in Hainault that he had inherited from his mother on her death in 1403; had Walter de Roët been alive in 1403, those lands would have passed to him, not to the heirs of his sisters.

It is often claimed that Philippa de Roët was placed by the Queen in the household of her daughter-in-law, the Countess of Ulster, around August 1355. Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster in her own right and a former ward of the Queen, was then twenty-three, and had been married to the King's second surviving son, the blond giant Lionel of Antwerp, since 1342, he taking the title Earl of Ulster in her right. There was indeed a girl called Philippa in the Countess's service at this time, and she had perhaps been engaged to help care for her mistress's first and only child, yet another Philippa, who was born on 16 August 1355 at Eltham Palace in Kent. This girl's name was Philippa Pan.

For a long while, historians did entertain doubts as to whether Philippa Pan was Philippa de Roët. These doubts arose from the use of the abbreviated name 'Philippa Pan.' in the fragmentary accounts that survive for the Countess's household. On 24 July 1356, a payment was made for the making of trimmings for the clothes of 'Philippa Pan.'; the following year, the Countess paid 2s.6d (£37) 'for the fashioning of one tunic' for her, and in December 1357, gave a serving boy 12d (£15) to escort Philippa Pan. from a place called 'Pullesdone' to Hatfield in Yorkshire, where Earl Lionel and his wife were to keep Christmas. In April 1358, the Countess Elizabeth presented Philippa Pan with a bodice and some furs to wear at the great feast given to

mark St George's Day. This is the last mention of Philippa Pan in the accounts, which come to an abrupt end in November 1359.

In recent years, several historians have subscribed to the theory that Pan. stands for 'Philippa, Paon de Roët's daughter', or 'Philippa, Panetto's daughter', Panetto being the name by which Paon de Roët was familiarly known at court; this theory seems rather far-fetched and contrived, especially since the Christian names of women in royal households were almost invariably accompanied by their surnames in accounts, registers and official documents. So the 'evidence' connecting Philippa Pan with the Roëts is slender indeed.

Who was she, then? It was at one time thought that Pan was short for *panetaria*, or Mistress of the Pantry, but it was virtually unheard of for such a post to be held by a woman, and there is no other instance of the word *panetaria* being thus abbreviated. Besides, a woman serving as Mistress of the Pantry would never be provided with fun by her mistress.

Pan. is probably an abbreviation for a surname, and the most convincing theory is that this Philippa was the daughter or kinswoman of a London mercer, William de la Panetrie (who died between 1349 and 1367), who lived in Soper Lane at the east end of Cheapside, in the parish of St Pancras. The Panetries were acquainted with the prosperous Chaucer family, who lived nearby in Thames Street in the Vintry Ward, and who had managed to place a son in the Countess Elizabeth's household; this son was a highly gifted youth who was not only to become famous in his own right, but would also play an important part in the lives of Philippa de Roët and Katherine Swynfbrd. His name was Geoffrey Chaucer, he had been born probably between 1339 and 1346, and he is renowned today as one of the greatest English poets who ever lived. Finding Philippa Pan in the same household as Geoffrey Chaucer lends weight to the theory that she was a Panetrie by birth, and that she had perhaps obtained her place by recommendation. As for her link with 'Pullesdone' — a place that cannot conclusively be identified — she could have been performing an official errand for her mistress, visiting relatives prior to Christmas, or accompanying a family member on business there; London merchants had far-flung interests.

Geoffrey Chaucer was the son of a rich and influential London vintner, and he is first recorded as a page in the household of the Countess Elizabeth on 4 April 1357, when she purchased shoes, black and red breeches and one of those short, revealing jackets called a 'paltock' (to

which hose and sleeves could be attached) for 'Galfridus Chaucer' of London. The following month, she gave him two shillings (£30). He is last mentioned in these accounts in December, when he was present at the Christmas gathering at Hatfield and received a grant of 3s.6d (£52) for necessities.

From 1357 to 1359, Chaucer appears to have served Lionel of Antwerp, possibly as a page. In 1359, having received arms and become a squire — he was never knighted — he served in Edward III's army against the French, and was captured at the siege of Rheims. The King himself paid his considerable ransom of £16 (£5,489) — which must demonstrate the high regard in which he was already held by the royal family — and he was freed by October 1360, when he brought a letter to England from Lionel of Antwerp, who was at that time in Calais. Chaucer then disappears from the historical record for six years. There has been much learned speculation about what happened to him during this period: that he was perhaps studying at Oxford (as his son Lewis later did) or Cambridge, or at the Inner Temple, a theory suggested by his signing himself 'attorney' in the 1390s — his writings reveal that he had a good knowledge of the law. Chaucer may have transferred to John of Gaunt's household, although there is no record of this, yet he was certainly on familiar terms with John of Gaunt by 1368, and John did later award him a life annuity. What is likeliest is that when Lionel of Antwerp went to Ireland to serve as the King's Lieutenant there in September 1361, taking his wife and daughter with him, Geoffrey Chaucer went with them. Lionel was created Duke of Clarence in 1362. Tragically, Elizabeth de Burgh died in Dublin on 10 December 1363.

Geoffrey Chaucer possibly returned to England in 1364, perhaps as a member of the party who were escorting little Philippa of Clarence to her grandmother's household, where she would be brought up. It may have been on his return that he entered upon a period of study at university or the Inns of Court. It is possible too that he was sponsored by a member of the royal family, possibly John of Gaunt, who is known to have maintained several students at Oxford.⁶⁷

So if Philippa de Roët was not the Philippa Pan recorded in the Countess of Ulster's household in 1356-8, where was she? The likeliest place was the Queen's own household, and the probability is that she was brought up there with her sister; by 1366, she had been appointed a *damoiselle* of the Queen's Chamber, where her duties would increasingly have involved nursing her ailing mistress: after a

riding accident in 1360, in which she possibly suffered internal injuries that were never treated, Queen Philippa's health declined, and her enforced immobility caused her legs to swell, which her contemporaries diagnosed as 'dropsy'.

By 1366, Katherine de Roët had left the Queen's household; it may have been as early as 1360 that she was placed by Philippa in the chamber of the latter's daughter-in-law, Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, Katherine's former playmate, now the wife of John of Gaunt. And within two to three years of joining the Duchess's establishment, Katherine was probably married to Sir Hugh Swynford, one of John of Gaunt's knights.

'The Magnificent Lord'

During her childhood, Katherine had benefited from the tutelage and example of Queen Philippa; now she was to come under the admirable influence of another great lady, the new Duchess of Lancaster, who was about eight years her senior and one of her former companions in the Queen's household.

The exquisite Blanche of Lancaster was the daughter of the King's cousin, the 'valiant' and 'well-respected' Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster.¹ While Edward III was the grandson of Edward I, Duke Henry was the grandson of Edward I's younger brother, Edmund Crouchback, who had been created Earl of Lancaster in 1267 and died in 1296. Earl Edmund's eldest son, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, had been executed for treason in 1322 by Edward II, but his younger brother, blind Henry, had been restored to the earldom two years later. Duke Henry was the latter's son. He had succeeded his father as Earl of Lancaster in 1345, and been created Duke in 1351, the second man in the realm ever to be raised to ducal rank, the first being the Black Prince, who had been created Duke of Cornwall in 1337.

Henry of Grosmont, who could have doubled for Chaucer's 'perfect, gentle knight', was the greatest nobleman in the kingdom. Not only was he Duke of Lancaster, but also Earl of Derby, Earl of Leicester, Earl of Lincoln, and Lord of Beaufort and Nogent in France. Consequently, his landed interests were vast. He was the greatest of the magnates, an experienced and masterly general, and utterly loyal to the King, who thought very highly of him and treated him as a valued friend. The Duke was a tall and imposing figure, genial and suave. He liked the fine things in life: good food and wine, luxurious and tasteful surroundings, and the robust charms of common women. Yet he was also temperate, pious and charitable, the founder of many religious houses, churches and hospitals.

Henry's duchess was Isabella de Beaumont; sadly, they had no son to succeed to his great inheritance. Instead, there were two daughters, Matilda and Blanche. Matilda of Lancaster had probably been born in 1340; after a brief first marriage, to Ralph de Stafford, which saw her widowed by the age of ten, she had been married in 1352 in the

King's Chapel at Westminster to William, Duke of Bavaria, who became Count of Holland in 1354 and Count of Hainault in 1356, on the death of his mother, the Countess Margaret; he was the son with whom the Countess had been briefly at war prior to this marriage, and it had been on his account that she had fled to England in 1351, bringing Paon de Roët with her.

After their wedding, Matilda went to Hainault to live with her husband, but in 1357 the insanity that was to render William incapable of ruling became alarmingly evident, and there were unfounded rumours attributing his madness to an attempt to poison him while he was in England. By 1358, he was being kept in confinement at The Hague, and later he was moved to the fortress of Quesnoy, where he remained shut up until his death thirty-one years later.' There were no children born of his marriage to Matilda.

Blanche of Lancaster, the younger of Duke Henry's daughters, had probably been born on 25 March 1342. She spent some of her formative years at court in the care of Queen Philippa, and came to know the royal family well. As we have seen, Katherine and Philippa de Roët were among her younger companions.

Edward III, needing to provide for his rapidly expanding family, was vigorously pursuing his successful policy of marrying his sons to English heiresses, and so consolidating his own interests and binding nobles and Crown closer together. Blanche was the greatest unmarried heiress in England, and Edward was determined to marry her to his third surviving son, John of Gaunt, and secure for John her share of the rich Lancaster patrimony. On 7 June 1358, the King petitioned Pope Innocent VI for a dispensation allowing the young couple to wed — they were within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity — which was granted on 8 January 1359.

It was in honour of the memory of 'Blanche the Fair' that Geoffrey Chaucer later wrote his dream poem, *The Boke of the Duchesse*.⁷ Allusions in the text make this clear: Chaucer uses the word 'Duchess' in the title, and there was only one duchess in England at the time; he makes a play on Blanche's name, calling her 'my Lady White', or 'good, fair White'; and he refers to 'a long castle' (Lancaster), St John (the Duke's name-saint) and 'a rich mount' (a pun for Richmond, John's earldom). The context of the poem will be discussed in Chapter 4, but it contains a eulogistic description of Blanche, whom Chaucer calls 'the flower of English womanhood':

'Gay and glad she was, fresh and sportive, sweet, simple [i.e. straight-forward] and of humble semblance, the fair lady whom men call Blanche.'

Chaucer's description reveals that, like her father, Blanche was intelligent, well-mannered, self-controlled and moderate in behaviour, 'not too grave and not too gay'. Her speech was 'low-toned and gentle', friendly and eloquent, and her character 'inclined to good'. She was no flatterer, but was truthful, 'devoid of malice' and never voiced a criticism. Happy and carefree in her demeanour, she was 'like a torch so bright that everyone could take its light'. Froissart echoes Chaucer's praise of Blanche, calling her 'gay, sociable, gentle, of humble semblance' and above all 'good'.

There is a corbel head that is said to be Blanche at Edington Priory in Wiltshire, and a statue of a girl holding a pet monkey, whom some have identified as her, on Queen Philippa's tomb in Westminster Abbey, but these are in no sense portraits; nor can we glean any idea of what she looked like from drawings of her tomb effigy, because the effigy depicted is not the original that was sculpted in the fourteenth century. So it is to Chaucer that we must turn for a detailed description of Blanche. Her hair, he says, was 'glittering golden', her eyes 'gentle and good, steadfast yet glad, not set too wide'. She did not 'shyly glance aside', but gazed openly with a 'candid mien' that was 'free of artfulness' and in no way wanton. Here, one suspects, was a young woman who knew her own worth, for although her look 'made men smart' with desire, she affected not to notice: 'well she guarded her good name'. Her lovely face was 'pink and white, fresh, lively-hued, [the] highest example of Nature's work'; her neck was graceful, her shoulders lovely, her breasts rounded, her skin unblemished. She was tall and straight-backed, with 'well-broad' hips, and her arms and legs were 'well-clothed in flesh', suggesting a degree of plumpness that was fashionable in the fourteenth century.

It has often been asserted that Chaucer's *Boke of the Duchesse* is not intended as a realistic portrayal of Blanche; undoubtedly, the poem was conceived as a dream sequence, and it was inspired by several well-known works: those of Ovid and Froissart, the popular mediaeval romance poem, *Le Roman de la Rose*, and the innovative verse of the avant-garde French writer and composer, Guillaume de Machaut. Yet although Chaucer's laudatory and idealised description of Blanche conforms to the literary conventions of the age, it does convey an impression of a real person. After all, this poem would have been circulated at court and amongst the Duke's circle, so its portrayal of

Blanche and her relationship with John of Gaunt would have had to be recognisable and convincing to those who had known her well. And Blanche may well have been lucky enough to have had the kind of looks that were fashionable in that period. Furthermore, Chaucer himself was a member of the royal household when he wrote the poem; he knew John of Gaunt and the rest of the royal family. So what he wrote must to a degree have been drawn from life.

John of Gaunt had been born probably in March (certainly by 28 May) 1340 at St Bavon's Abbey in Ghent, Flanders⁹ — hence his appellation, 'Gaunt' being an English corruption of 'Ghent'. He was always to demonstrate a sense of affiliation with the country of his birth, and with Hainault, his mother's birthplace. This affinity might partly explain why he would be attracted to Katherine Swynford, herself a Hainaulter.

His early years had been spent in the care of a nurse, Isolda Newman, under the supervision of his mother, Queen Philippa. 'The Lord John' was created Earl of Richmond on 20 November 1342, the King himself solemnly girding the two-year-old child with the sword of his earldom, which had been held by the Dukes of Brittany since the Norman Conquest, and was vacant on account of the death of the last Duke, whose infant heir had been passed over." This earldom brought young John an income of 2,000 marks (£303,882) per annum. At the age of three, with his father and his elder brothers, he was accepted into the confraternity of Lincoln Cathedral, thus forging the first of his close links and attachment to Lincoln, its cathedral chapter" and the social orbit of the Swynford family.

John's nurse was pensioned off in February 1346, at which time he would have been assigned a male governor to oversee his education and his training in the knightly arts. We know little about his childhood, but all the evidence suggests that he was fond of his parents — he was especially close to his mother — and his siblings, and grew up in a happy, stable family, which was not always the case where royal princes were concerned.

Above all, John would have grown up to the heady awareness that his father the King was winning great victories over the French and international renown, and that his glorious brother, the Black Prince, ten years his senior, had assisted most nobly in achieving those victories. It was an era of growing national confidence and pride, and the young John's world was surely dominated by triumphal heroes.

One man whose influence on John was paramount was Henry, Duke of Lancaster, the man whom, next to his father and eldest brother, he seems to have revered most. In Duke Henry, he had before him the example of a great lord who was honourable, trustworthy and pious, and doubtless the young John thrilled to tales of the Duke's youthful crusading adventures and his distinguished victories over the Scots and the French. He seems to have spent his life trying to emulate Henry of Lancaster, from his military successes and diplomatic achievements to his charitable enterprises and elegant mode of living.

On 29 August 1350, when he was only ten years old, John first saw active service in the war with France, when he accompanied his father and the Black Prince on a naval expedition that ended in a dramatic victory over enemy ships off Winchelsea, with the King capturing twenty vessels. John was too young to take part, but Froissart says his father had taken him along 'because he much loved him'. And that decision nearly proved fatal, for the ship carrying the King and his sons was rammed by an enemy vessel and began to sink; they were saved only through the courageous intervention of Duke Henry, who brought his ship alongside that of the aggressor, boarded it and heroically rescued them. For John, it was a salutary initiation into the realities of warfare, and another reason for hero-worshipping the Duke.

John was always close to his eldest brother, whom he obviously looked up to and tried — apparently without jealousy — to emulate, and from at least 1 March 1350 until 20 May 1355, he lived in the Black Prince's household, residing with him mainly at Berkhamsted Castle and the manor of Byfleet in Surrey. The Prince acted as a mentor to the boy, and supervised his training in arms; according to Froissart, he was 'very fond' of John and always referred to him as his 'very dear and well-beloved brother'.

In July 1355, the fifteen-year-old John received the accolade of knighthood, whose chivalrous tenets he was to follow to the best of his ability all his life. That year, he served on a campaign in France under Duke Henry, and in the winter of 1355-6, he was in Scotland with the King, forcing a stand-down by the Scots that became known as 'Burnt Candlemas'; John was a witness to their surrender of Berwick on 13 January 1356. The young man's qualities evidently impressed

the Scots, because in 1357 they proposed naming him as the successor to their childless King David II, a plan that - sadly for John - came to nothing. John was to retain a special understanding and respect for the Scots throughout his career, and would achieve significant diplomatic successes with them in future years.

In *The Boke of the Duchesse*, Chaucer, who must have come to know John of Gaunt fairly well, and observed him on many occasions, has him say that from his youth he had 'most faithfully paid tribute as a devotee to love, most unrestrainedly, and joyfully become his thrall, with willing body, heart and all', and that he had carried on in this fashion 'for ages, many and many a year', with 'lightness' and 'wayward thoughts'. But his only recorded early love affair was with Marie de St Hilaire (or Hilary), one of his mother's *damoiselles*, who, like Katherine Swynford, came from Hainault. According to Froissart, this youthful indiscretion, which almost certainly occurred when John was in his teens, resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child — the only one, apart from the Beauforts, that John ever acknowledged. Her name was Blanche, and the likelihood is that she was born well before his marriage to Blanche of Lancaster, probably in the later 1350s. Certainly no hostile chronicler mentioned the affair later on, nor attempted to make political capital out of it, which supports the theory that it happened before John came to political prominence.

In 1360, Edward III granted Marie an annuity of £20 (£5,779) per annum, the same amount as that given in 1359-60 to Joan de St Hilary (who was surely Marie's sister), and in 1367 to Elizabeth Chandos, two of Marie's fellow *damoiselles*; this parity suggests that the annuity, handsome as it was, and more than the other *damoiselles* ever received, was awarded as much for exceptional service to the Queen as to support the mother of the Queen's bastard granddaughter. Marie remained in Philippa's service until 1369, and was still alive in 1399, when she was in receipt of a pension from John of Gaunt 'for the good and agreeable service she has rendered for a long time to our honoured lady and mother, Philippa, late Queen of England'. Thus, in his characteristically honourable fashion, John provided for Marie and — as will be seen - their daughter all their lives.

John of Gaunt would surely have known Blanche of Lancaster well. Their fathers were cousins and staunch friends, and she was a frequent presence in the Queen's household. Given that they were close in age, John and Blanche - she was the younger by two years - may have been childhood playmates from infancy.

At Christmas 1357 and New Year 1358, John was a guest of his brother Lionel of Antwerp, Earl of Ulster, and the Countess Elizabeth at the Queen's manor of Hatfield, near Doncaster in Yorkshire. This was the gathering at which young Geoffrey Chaucer was also present, and it was perhaps the occasion on which the talented Chaucer first came to John's notice.

Blanche of Lancaster may also have been present at Hatfield, and if so, John may have taken the opportunity to pay court to her. It was six months later that Edward III applied for a dispensation for the young couple to marry.

Chaucer, in his *Boke of the Duchesse*, recalled John telling him that he was first taken with Blanche's charms after being struck by how vividly she stood out among a group of fair ladies:

In beauty, courtesy and grace,

In radiant modesty of face,

Fine bearing, virtue, every way ...

It was my sweet, her right true self —

Demeanour steadfast, calm and free,

And poise imbued with dignity.

He watched her dancing gracefully, singing and laughing, and noticed that her eyes were gracious, her voice 'warm with kindness'. To him, she appeared 'a treasure house of utter bliss': 'that flower of womanhood was life and joy', the chief source of his 'well-being'. But when he embarked on his 'mighty quest' to win her love, he initially met with cool rejection. Blanche 'gave no false encouragement; she spurned such petty artifice'. Her ardent swain composed songs that, while 'not well done', were written 'in passion for my heart's delight', but he held back from confessing to her how much pain he was suffering on her account, fearing lest she might take offence at his presumption. Yet in the end, 'I had to tell her, or die.' Quaking in dread, he declared his love and devotion, swore 'to guard her honour evermore', and begged for mercy, not daring to look Blanche in the eye. Afterwards, he could not recall exactly what her response had been, but 'the gist of it was simply "No"'.

Thus rejected, John stole away and hid his sorrow for many days. But his desire was such that he determined to persist in his suit, intent on overcoming all resistance, and in the end, after many months, he joyfully won the heart of his lady. 'To seal the gift, she gave a ring', which to him was 'the utmost precious thing'; he felt as if he had been 'from death to life upcast'.

All this would have had little relevance to the realities of royal matchmaking, but it had everything to do with the game of courtly love, and no doubt the young and ardent John of Gaunt took full advantage of the opportunities afforded by that convention, for all that his was essentially an arranged marriage. From what Chaucer tells us, we may infer that he set himself to win Blanche's heart as well as her hand. For him, she would always be 'my lady bright, whom I have loved with all my might'.

There is other testimony beside Chaucer's to support the claim that John did fall in love with Blanche: his apparent faithfulness to her through all their years of marriage; his inconsolable grief at her passing; his enduring homage to her memory; and his desire to be buried beside her. Of course, that could equally have been inspired by a wish to be laid to rest beside the woman from whom he had derived his title and wealth, and who was the mother of his heir, but taken with all the other evidence, it would appear to have been motivated by deep affection and tender memories too.

And given that this was a love match, it is feasible that John's ardour for his lady was well established by the time he spent that Christmas at Hatfield, for Chaucer tells us that Blanche kept him at bay for a year. This combination of true love and political and dynastic desirability was most unusual in that era of arranged marriages — but John of Gaunt was more than once to prove unconventional when it came to love and marriage.

John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster were married on Sunday 19 May 1359 in a lavish ceremony in the Queen's Chapel at Reading Abbey, one of the foremost Benedictine monasteries in the realm. He was nineteen, she seventeen. Thomas de Chynham, clerk of the Queen's Chapel, officiated, and Robert Wyvil, Bishop of Salisbury, pronounced the benediction. John's wedding gift to Blanche was a gold ring with a great diamond set in pearls.

Two weeks of festivities followed the wedding. There were feasts, boat races and three days of jousting in the meadows on the banks of the

Thames. Then the royal family and their guests rode to London, where tournaments were held over a further three days at Smithfield, before huge crowds. Here, the King, his four eldest sons and nineteen of his lords disguised themselves as the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London, acquitted themselves with great honour in the lists, then revealed their true identity, to the lyrical delight of the spectators. Alongside the captive Kings of France and Scotland, the Queen was watching, along with her daughters and her ladies, and it is more than likely that the Roët sisters were present too.

If Chaucer is to be believed, John's love for Blanche deepened after marriage, and he was convinced he could not have chosen a better wife, for she was good, loyal and true, 'the queen of all my body'. Throughout their marriage, he 'belonged to her entire': there is no record of him dishonouring his marriage vows, and no breath of scandal tainted his name, which is in sharp contrast to the reputation he was to gain during his second marriage. Chaucer has John declare,

'Our joy was ever fresh and new,
Our hearts were so in harmony
That neither was ever contrary
To the other heart when sorrows came.'

In truth, they bore all things the same
Whatever joy or grief they had.

Alike, they were both glad or sad;

'Assured in union we were,
And thus we lived for many a year,
So well, I cannot tell you how'

Although Blanche was younger than John, and sworn to obedience and subservience to him, Chaucer implies that he always deferred to her. For –

When I was wrong and she was right, Always in generosity [She]

forgave me most becomingly. In every youthful circumstance She took me in her governance. Always her counsel was so true.

It is worthy of notice that, in his idyllic portrayal of the married love between John and Blanche, Chaucer made a dramatic departure from contemporary literary practice, in which marriage is often seen as sounding the death-knell to love, which can only truly flourish in an illicit or courtly context. This striking departure itself suggests that the conjugal relationship between John and Blanche was unusually close and tender.

It is tempting to speculate on the kind of sexual relationship those two shared. Chaucer makes it clear that Blanche had a degree of worldly knowledge and an understanding of good and evil, but says her self-esteem was such that she would not permit any diminution of respect towards her person. One would imagine that the young John, with his well-bred ideals of love and chivalry, treated his wife with deference, and even reverence, in bed. A later assertion by the chronicler Thomas Walsingham, that John brought prostitutes to share in bedtime romps with his understandably distressed wife, is almost certainly malicious and groundless, and invented purely for the purposes of character assassination.

Devoted as she was, Blanche, unlike the Queen, did not accompany her husband on his frequent expeditions overseas.²⁶ First, John was usually sent abroad on military campaigns in which there was no place for women; and second, Blanche was frequently pregnant.

The young couple were both pious, and took their spiritual life very seriously. They were joint founder members St Mary's College next to St David's Cathedral in Wales;²⁷ they petitioned the Pope for the right to choose or change their confessors, for permission for themselves and members of their households to have portable altars, and for 'plenary remission [of sins] at the hour of death'. Like most aristocratic ladies, Blanche undertook charitable works, and in 1367, she successfully pleaded with the King to pardon a condemned murderer.

As we have seen, Blanche won high praise from Chaucer and Froissart, both of whom knew her personally. She could read and write, had literary interests and enjoyed poetry, so she may have been their patron. Thomas Speght, in his 1602 edition of Chaucer's works, claims that one of the poet's earliest poems, 'An ABC was 'made, as some say, at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her religion very devout'. Speght may

have had access to sources that are lost to us, but his claim cannot be proved because there are no perceptible allusions to Blanche in 'An ABC'.

Blanche conceived her first child by the end of June 1359, and was four months pregnant when her husband left England on 28 October to accompany the King on a new military expedition to France, Edward III being determined to have himself crowned at Rheims. It was on this campaign that Geoffrey Chaucer was captured by the French and had to be ransomed.

Blanche's baby, named Philippa in honour of the Queen (who was probably her godmother), was born on 31 March 1360. Out of the concern that we feel for her condition', Edward III had arranged for Blanche to stay with the Queen for the last months before her confinement,³³ but her child was actually born at Leicester Castle: on 21 May, Philippa paid the expenses of the ceremony to mark her daughter-in-law's 'uprising' (or 'churcing') at Leicester.³⁴ The midwife in attendance had perhaps been 'our well-beloved Elyot, midwife of Leicester', who later attended John's second-wife and Katherine Swynford, and was rewarded for her services in both cases.

Blanche had her own household, separate from that of her husband, with her own staff of officers, ladies and servants. There is no record of Katherine de Roët being in that household before 24 January 1365 — when she is referred to as Blanche's *ancille* (maidservant) — but John of Gaunt's registers for this period have not survived, so it is quite possible that Katherine was serving the Countess considerably earlier than that, and had been placed by the Queen in Blanche's nursery in 1360 to help care for the new baby, possibly as a rocker, a job often assigned to a young girl of Katherine's age, which was then about ten years. Froissart just says that 'in her youth, she had been of the household of the Duchess Blanche of Lancaster', but he doesn't specify how old she was at the time.

The female attendants of noblewomen were routinely required to help care for their mistress's offspring, and given Katherine's later appointment as governess, and her evident rapport with the young, it would appear that she had early on gained experience in looking after children and demonstrated a talent for it, thus earning the confidence of her employers. It may be that Katherine's placement with the Duchess

Blanche came about as a result of arrangements that were made by

the Queen when the pregnant Blanche was staying with her, and that Katherine was one of those who travelled with the Countess to Leicester.

Leicester Castle, the principal seat of the Earls of Leicester, was to become one of John of Gaunt's favourite residences, probably because of its associations with Duke Henry; John 'especially loved to be with his household' here, keeping great state, entertaining lavishly and hunting in nearby Leicester Forest, where he had a substantial hunting box called — delightfully — Bird's Nest. And he was popular in Leicester, for thanks to his frequent presence in their midst, the townsfolk enjoyed greater prosperity than they had ever known.

Over the years, Katherine would probably stay in Leicester Castle on many occasions. It had been built in 1068-88 and extended in the middle of the twelfth century, when the great aisled hall of stone that John and Katherine knew, with its lofty roof of braced beams, was put up; below were cellars or dungeons. Inside the castle was the ancient Saxon church of St Mary de Castro, which had been rebuilt in the twelfth century by the earls of Leicester; its slender spire was added in the fourteenth century.

In the outer ward of the castle was the Hospital of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, founded by Henry, Earl of Lancaster, in 1331 for the care of the poor and infirm of Leicester. This foundation was extended by his son, Duke Henry, in the 1350s to house a precious relic, a thorn from the Crown of Thorns, and it was at that time that the small but 'exceeding fair' collegiate church of St Mary was built beside it, with cloisters and pretty houses for the prebendaries. The whole area of four acres, which was enclosed by the thick castle wall and accessed by a stately triple-arched and vaulted gateway, became known as the *novum opus*, or the new work, which was soon being colloquially referred to as the Newarke, a name still in use today.

Whether Katherine was in Blanche's household sooner rather than later, she had again been exceedingly fortunate in being placed with a kind and affectionate mistress. Blanche's many qualities would have made her an easy person to serve, and her piety and literary interests were bound to have made some impression upon a young and intelligent girl of Katherine's age. In Blanche, Katherine could profit from the example of a lady who conducted herself with dignity and honour, who was moderate in all her doings, with an effortless grace and serene demeanour, and who expected and received the respect that was her due, not just as a duchess but as a woman. The young

and impressionable Katherine would have observed too the great love that lay between the Duke and his lady, and perhaps hoped that she herself, in due course, would find such unusual happiness in marriage.

Katherine spent her youth, indeed her life, in the shadow of the Hundred Years War, but in 1360 that war was going well for England. Having failed to assert his claim to the Crown of France, Edward III had resorted to diplomacy, and on 8 May concluded the Treaty of Bretigny, which ceded to him all the lands he had won by conquest as well as an extended duchy of Aquitaine in full sovereignty. On 18 May, the King and his sons returned home to England in triumph, John having the added joy of greeting his new daughter. On 20 May, doubtless in recognition of his son's good service in France, the King granted John the honour and castle of Hertford and other property/3

Hertford Castle was a residence that suitably befitted the exalted estate of the young Earl and Countess of Richmond. Formerly the property of John's grandmother, Isabella of France (the widow of Edward II), who had died in 1358, it had been built three centuries before by William the Conqueror on low-lying land on the encircling banks of the River Lea. Successive monarchs had embellished the hall, chapel and royal apartments, but the ancient fortifications had crumbled, and never been replaced because there was no longer any need for them in this more peaceful age. Hertford was also conveniently situated, being within easy riding distance of London and Westminster. John of Gaunt instituted an ongoing programme of lavish improvements there, transforming the castle into a virtual palace, and unsurprisingly, it remained one of his favourite residences all his life.

John was abroad again, in France with the King, from August to November 1360, and on 20 November received his first summons to Parliament, as Earl of Richmond. This marked his debut in political life.

The year 1361 saw another virulent outbreak of the dreaded Black Death, which claimed no less than a quarter of the already decimated population of England. Its most notable victim was the widely mourned Henry, Duke of Lancaster, who died on 23 March and was buried near the high altar in St Mary's Church in the Newarke at Leicester, the foundation he himself had handsomely endowed, doubtless intending it to serve as a mausoleum for the House of Lancaster; the church was unfinished at his death, and it was left to John of Gaunt to take Duke Henry's place as its patron and pay for its

completion.

Not long afterwards, the Duchess of Lancaster also died of plague at Leicester. She too was buried in the Newarke. Losing both her parents at almost the same time must have been a terrible blow to poor Blanche, who was probably pregnant with her second child.

But Duke Henry's death brought about a spectacular change in John of Gaunt's fortunes, for the dead man's great titles and estates were to be divided between his two co-heiresses, whose husbands would inherit them in their right.⁵ Not surprisingly, Edward III acted swiftly: only two days after the Duke expired, in the absence of Matilda of Lancaster, who was in Hainault, John was granted temporary custody of all the Duke's lands until a fair division could be made.

Resplendent in 'a scarlet robe embroidered with garters of blue taffeta', John was admitted by the King to the Order of the Garter that April. Edward III had founded this prestigious order of chivalry in 1348, in honour of England's patron saint, St George, and in emulation of King Arthur's Round Table. Its motto, *Honi soit qui mal y pense* (Evil be to he who evil thinks), is said to have originated when, in the face of much coarse jesting on the part of his courtiers, the King gallantly retrieved the Countess of Salisbury's garter, which had slipped off while she was dancing; the motto was adapted from the words he used to rebuke the onlookers, adding that they would soon see the garter much honoured. Membership of the order was limited to the King and twenty-five knights, and admittance to it was one of the highest accolades of chivalry. The Queen herself was an associate member, as a Dame of the Fraternity of the Garter, and one day, Katherine Swynford too would be associated with this famous order.

In July 1361, the Lancaster inheritance was apportioned between Matilda and Blanche, by mutual consent: Matilda - who now hastened back to England - succeeded as Countess of Leicester, and Blanche as Countess of Lancaster, Lincoln and Derby; from henceforth, in right of his wife, John of Gaunt was earl of those counties, and in possession of the vast northern estates that went with these great titles.⁴⁹ He also became Lord of Beaufort and Nogent in France, Lord High Steward (or Seneschal) of England (his hereditary right as Earl of Lincoln) and Constable of Chester. Overnight, he had become immensely rich and powerful.

The royal family spent Christmas 1361 at Berkhamsted Castle as guests of the Black Prince and his bride, Joan of Kent, whom he had

married in October. The marriage had occasioned no little stir within the royal family, because Joan had a scandalous past; Queen Philippa in particular was unhappy about it, although she had attended the wedding. But the Black Prince had been determined to marry Joan. She was 'in her time the most beautiful lady in all the realm of England, and the most amorous, famous for the extravagance of her dress', and their precipitate secret wedding suggests that the Prince was in love with her — Froissart calls it a love match. As far back as 1348, Edward had given his cousin 'Jeanette' a silver beaker; the nickname suggests a long familiarity between them, and of course they would have known each other from childhood. Because of the illicit nature of their marriage — which took place without the King's knowledge, and had to be solemnised a second time after the requisite dispensation had been granted — the Pope required the Prince and Princess to do penance. If it had been unusual for John and Blanche to find love in an arranged union, it was astonishing for the heir to the throne, the most desirable catch in Europe, to marry for love, and gain no political or material advantage from it. But despite this, and the misgivings of her in-laws, Joan proved to be a model Princess of Wales, being of a gentle and kindly nature, a peacemaker by inclination, a loyal and loving wife who kept well out of public affairs — and a good friend to John of Gaunt.

This would be the last Christmas the Black Prince was to spend with his family for many years. In July 1362, the King created him Duke of Aquitaine, and he and the Princess crossed the sea to take up permanent residence in Bordeaux.

The childless Matilda of Lancaster died unexpectedly in England on 9 April 1362. John of Gaunt had much to gain from her death, for it brought him the other half of the Lancastrian inheritance, his wife Blanche being Matilda's sole heir, and made him the most powerful man in the realm after the King; he would now own about one third of all England, and enjoy an annual income of approximately £12,803, (£442,075), which far exceeded that of any other peer, only a lucky few realising even £4,000 (£1,075,396).

The acquisition of such wealth — his landed estate was worth £43 billion in today's values - gave rise to the first of the many scurrilous rumours that were to blight John's life. By June 1362, when he and Blanche were touring their new estates and came to Leicester Castle, the 'vulgar repute' that Matilda had been poisoned by her brother-in-law was rife. In fact, it appears that the rumours were entirely baseless, and that, like her parents, she had died of plague.⁵⁵ But

these calumnies never quite went away.

To mark his own fiftieth birthday on 13 November 1362, Edward III formally created John of Gaunt Duke of Lancaster: 'and then our lord the King invested his said son John with the sword [and] garbed him with a fur cape and above it a gold circlet'; at the same time, John's brothers Lionel and Edmund, his junior by a year, were created Duke of Clarence and Earl of Cambridge respectively.⁵⁶ From now on John would be known as 'Monseigneur de Lancaster'.

The Duchy of Lancaster was effectively a state within a state, with lands and property extending mainly across the Midlands, the North and the Welsh Marches, hundreds of manors, a well-oiled administration and vast revenues. John was to spend the bulk of his income on maintaining, rebuilding or remodelling his numerous castles, houses and estates, keeping his enormous household and retinue, affording the lavish hospitality and gifts that were expected of a great prince, financing military expeditions and diplomatic trips, and providing for his growing family.

The new Duke's establishment now increased in size and splendour to reflect his magnificence. Only the King's was greater. John had his own council, receiver-general, secretariat and hierarchy of household officers, as well as an army of officials to administer and care for his estates and properties. His household numbered 115 persons, and he maintained the greatest and most powerful noble retinue in the kingdom/a chivalrous company' of between 160 and 200 men, including between 80 and 125 'highly-regarded knights conspicuous for their courtly and chivalrous skills', who were required to model themselves on King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. They were bound to the Duke by indentures, having promised to serve him in times of war and peace in return for more-than-generous annuities, grants of land, liberal patronage and the social prestige that came from being allied to so great a magnate. Needless to say, demand for places in the Duke's retinue was high. John of Gaunt's retainers and servants sported his livery of white and blue, and the officers of his household wore the famous Lancastrian livery collar of linked Ss.

A survey of the ducal warrants shows that John exercised a close degree of personal interest in all aspects of his affairs, and that he was frequently generous, benevolent and merciful to his bondsmen and tenants, showing himself 'in all his actions good and gentle'. He ensured that their dwellings were kept in good repair, excused them rents and dues in times of hardship, and willingly permitted them to

go on pilgrimage or take holy orders. He distributed £2 (£626) in alms every Friday and Saturday, sent gifts of firewood to the poor lepers of Leicester, and wine to the prisoners in Newgate gaol. He allowed his villeins to perform their service of carrying wood to his castle at Tutbury in summer, to spare them the discomfort of doing it in the winter cold. The chronicler Knighton, who lauded him for his clemency, tells how he refused to hang certain servants who had stolen some of his silver, declaring, 'No man should lose his life for my chattels.' In the years to come, Katherine Swynford herself would benefit repeatedly from John's open-handedness and consideration.

Thanks to the enormous wealth and power that had come to him through his magnificent marriage, John of Gaunt was for the rest of his life to play a leading role at the centre of English — and indeed international - politics. And with the Black Prince in Aquitaine, and Lionel serving as the King's deputy in Ireland, John, at just twenty-two, was now the most important man in England after the monarch himself. Edward III quickly came to rely on him, as both a soldier and a diplomat, although it must be said that he was to enjoy considerably more success in the latter capacity. The acquisition of the Lancaster inheritance also gave John the capacity to raise large armies from his estates, and so play a prominent role in the war with France. At home, he was to be active in Parliament and highly influential at court.

It was an honour to serve such a prince, and a signal responsibility to help nurture the ducal children, which is what Katherine de Roët was probably doing at this time. And she would have been kept busy. Around 1362 (or 1364), Blanche bore a son and heir, John, who tragically died young, probably before 4 May 1366, when his mother gave birth to another son who was also named John. The first John was probably still living in 1365, when a second son Edward was born; the fact that two of the ducal sons were called John after their father suggests that this was the name of choice for the heir, so we may infer from the use of the name Edward for the second son that the first John still lived when he was born, but that the latter had died by the time the third son was given the same name. This first John was probably the child buried under an arch near the high altar in St Mary's Church in the Newarke at Leicester. By 21 February 1363, Blanche was also the mother of a second daughter, Elizabeth, having borne three children in less than three years.

Like all great mediaeval households, John of Gaunt's was itinerant, moving around the country to satisfy the demands of politics, estate business, law enforcement, hunting and the social calendar. The Duke

himself would ride from house to house, resplendent on his hunting courser, but kept horse-drawn carriages for the use of his wife and children. The whole household went with them, accompanied by a long train of carts, pack-horses and sumpter mules carrying furniture, hangings, household effects, clothing, documents and the ornaments of the ducal chapel.⁶⁴

Nearly every summer. John made a habit of spending time on his lands in the Midlands and the North. Katherine would soon have become familiar with an array of luxurious Lancastrian residences, including the imposing castles at Kenilworth, Higham Ferrers, Bolingbroke, Tutbury, Knaresborough and Pontefract — there were more than thirty in all. But for much of the rest of the year, John was at Hertford or in London, and when he was in the capital, he was to be found at his chief residence, the magnificent palace of the Savoy, the pride of his properties and the outward symbol of his greatness. It was here that he entertained visiting royalty and ambassadors, who were invariably suitably impressed by their luxurious surroundings.

The Savoy Palace, that 'very fine building on the Thames', was to figure large in Katherine's life. Standing a mile beyond the western walls of the City of London, amongst the aristocratic and episcopal mansions that lined the Strand on the Thames side, it occupied a large area that today stretches from Waterloo Bridge to Durham House Street. In those days, the Strand was paved as far as the Savoy. The churches of St Mary-le-Strand and St Clement Danes stood a little to the north-east, and the convent gardens of Westminster Abbey (now Covent Garden) were opposite. Further east was the Temple and beyond it the City of London itself. Immediately to the south of the palace was the London residence of John's 'faithful friend', the Bishop of Carlisle, then beyond it the house of the Bishop of Durham, the cross at Charing built in memory of Edward I's queen, Eleanor of Castile, the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields and the Hospital of St Mary of Rouncevalles, which enjoyed John of Gaunt's patronage and stood at the entrance to the present Northumberland Avenue. Beyond it, as the Thames curved south, lay York Place, the town palace of the Archbishops of York, and Westminster, the seat of government, with its imposing royal palace and abbey.

The Savoy Theatre (built 1881) and the Savoy Hotel (built 1889) now occupy 'the Precinct of the Savoy' in which the palace was sited, and Savoy Street, Savoy Place, Savoy Way, Savoy Steps, Savoy Row, Savoy Court, Savoy Buildings and Savoy Hill are reminders of it. The Duchy of Lancaster, which is now incorporated in the Crown, still has its

offices where the mighty palace once stood, in Lancaster Place by Waterloo Bridge.

Although there had been a mansion on the site as early as 1189, the original Savoy Palace was built by Peter, Count of Savoy, an uncle of Henry III's queen, Eleanor of Provence, in the thirteenth century. In 1245, Peter was granted a parcel of land east of Westminster 'in that street called the Strand', and in 1263 raised a palace there. It is his gilded statue that stands above the doorway of the modern Savoy Hotel. In his will, he bequeathed this property to the Hospice of St Bernard, a monastic community in Savoy, from whom Queen Eleanor purchased it for her son, Edmund Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster, in 1284. In the 1350s, at a cost of £35,000 (£13,660,715), his grandson, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, 'entirely rebuilt' the Savoy as a sumptuous palace, paying for it out of the profits he had made in the Hundred Years War. In 1357-60, the captive King John II of France enjoyed 'a most agreeable' stay at the Savoy, and when he returned to England as a hostage in 1364, he specifically asked to stay there; he died there in April of that year.

The palace was reputed to be the most beautiful and opulent building in England — it was 'a marvellous structure unmatched in the kingdom', 'the fairest manor in Europe', 'unto which there was none in the realm to be compared in beauty, splendour, nobility and stateliness'. It rivalled even the King's great palace at Westminster. It was built on a quadrangular collegiate plan; at its core was a magnificent great hall, which was surrounded by domestic and service ranges erected around courtyards and connected by cloisters and alleyways; the ducal apartments lay behind the great hall, and had windows facing the river. The whole precinct was surrounded by a fortified wall, bisected by a massive gateway with a portcullis on the Strand, a smaller gate next to it for pedestrians, and a river gate at the side. There was a chapel to the right of the front gateway, a library, a treasure chamber, extensive wine cellars, accommodation for an army of servants and retainers, stables, orchards, a fish pond and beautiful rose and vegetable gardens with ornamental rails and flower borders, all sloping down to the Thames; the Duke loved his gardens, and actively involved himself in their planning and maintenance. At the rear of the palace, elegant terraces overlooked the Thames, which in the fourteenth century was much wider and shallower than it is today. A low wall ran along the river's edge, and stairs led down to the landing stages, where barges could be moored. With the narrow streets of London so congested, most people preferred to travel by river. John's richly appointed barges -he bought a new one in 1373 —

had a master and a crew of eight oarsmen, and he would use them whenever he wished to visit the court at Westminster or, later on, the Black Prince at Kennington Palace on the Surrey shore of the Thames.

John of Gaunt made yet more improvements to the Savoy. He employed the great master mason, Henry Yevele, whose work can still be seen in Westminster Hall, Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral. Yevele was much in demand, for it was he who refined and improved the new Perpendicular style of architecture, with its flattened arches and fan vaulting; he had worked for the Black Prince at Kennington, and would do so for Edward III and Richard II at Westminster, the Tower of London, Eltham Palace, Sheen Palace and Leeds Castle. John of Gaunt also commissioned Henry Yevele to make improvements to Hertford Castle.

The interiors of the Savoy were sumptuous. The furniture, rich beds and headboards — one of which, emblazoned with heraldic shields, was said to be worth 1,000 marks (£125,221) — French tapestries, silk hangings, gold and silver plate, stained glass, carpets, cushions, fine napery and ornaments all afforded lavish evidence of the Duke's immense wealth and superb taste. His registers record payments for numerous luxury items, including jewelled goblets, devotional books with gem-encrusted leather bindings, images of the Virgin Mary, sculpted reliefs of the Crucifixion, enamels, and rich silks from Constantinople in the Lancastrian colours of blue and white. The contents of the palace alone were valued at £10,000 (£3,756,616), and those of the chapel at £500 (187,831). Nothing survives, but the tapestries must have been similar to those John owned in 1393, which depicted the Frankish King Clovis, Moses confronting Pharaoh, and *The Life of the Lover and the Beloved*. The palace was also the repository for John's priceless treasures, his armour, his furs and cloth of gold, his fabulous collection of jewels and precious stones, and his wardrobe. 'No prince in Christendom had a finer wardrobe, and scarcely any could even match it, for there were such quantities of vessels and silver plate that five carts would hardly suffice to carry them.' The Savoy housed too the Duke's secretariat and many of the written records, deeds and muniments of his Duchy.

Although he had his private apartments, John would have taken his meals in the great hall of his palace, at a table set on the dais or in a window embrasure, accompanied by his *familia*. This word applied not only to his family members, but also to the knights of his retinue, his confessor and honoured guests. The food was prepared by his master cook and an army of helpers, who worked in the various

service departments: the kitchen, pantry, buttery, poultry, scullery and saltery. Dishes served at the ducal table included venison, game, salmon, bream, stockfish, herring, rabbit, poultry and lampreys. At the great feasts of the year - Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost — the Duke's arrival in the hall was heralded by his trumpeters.⁷

There is no way of knowing if the present Savoy Chapel, which is owned by the Queen as Duke of Lancaster, occupies the site of the original palace chapel, because no plans of the palace survive, and in the early sixteenth century, Henry VII 'beautifully rebuilt' the Savoy⁷⁵ as the Hospital of St John, for the succour of the poor. This tiny gem of a chapel, which was part of Henry VII's foundation, suffered damage by fire in 1864, and was largely rebuilt in the Perpendicular style the following year by Queen Victoria; since 1937, it has served as the Chapel of the Royal Victorian Order. Interestingly, the Savoy Chapel, like the hospital it served, was originally dedicated to St John the Baptist, one of John of Gaunt's own name-saints.

What was he like, this exalted Duke, in whose household Katherine lived, and whose amorous interest she would one day ignite? He is known to most people largely through his brief appearance in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, in which 'old John of Gaunt, time-honour'd Lancaster' features as a dying elder statesman who makes a famously patriotic speech about the kingdom he has loyally served for many decades:

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,

This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,

This other Eden, demi-paradise,

This fortress built by Nature for herself

Against infection and the hand of war;

This happy breed of men, this little world,

This precious stone set in the silver sea ...

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,

This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings.

But this is not the sum of the man - far from it, for these sentiments are unlikely to have informed the thinking of the real John of Gaunt, who was a remarkable and complex character, entirely undeserving of the poor reputation cast upon him for centuries by historians and other writers, who mostly followed the calumnies of hostile chroniclers or accepted Sir John Fortescue's fifteenth-century view of John as the oppressive over-mighty subject *par excellence*. For them, he was an unscrupulous and immoral tyrant. It was not until 1904, with the appearance of Sydney Armitage-Smith's monumental biography, that a fairer and more considered view of John of Gaunt emerged.

For better or worse, John of Gaunt made a tremendous impact on the history of England; even today, oral traditions, legends and folk memories of him still survive throughout the Lancastrian 'countries', as his domains were called.⁷⁸ His name is writ large in the annals of the age of chivalry. He was the greatest English nobleman of his time.

In appearance, even as a young man, John of Gaunt was commanding. In *The Boke of the Duchesse*, Chaucer gives us a tantalising glimpse of him at the age of twenty-eight, describing him as 'a splendidly looking knight ... of noble stature' with a 'stately manner'. Traditionally, it has been asserted that John was unusually tall, because from 1625 it was claimed that a suit of armour measuring 6'8" in height, which is still preserved in the Tower of London, had been made for him; in 1699, a visitor to the Tower admired its codpiece, 'which was almost as big as a poop-lantern, and better worth a lewd lady's admiration than any piece of antiquity in the Tower' but — sadly for those who relish such 'evidence' of the Duke's famed virility — it has now been established that this armour dates only from around 1540, was made in Germany, and has nothing to do with John of Gaunt.

The only other surviving description of John is to be found in the Portuguese chronicle written by Fernao Lopes, whose account was based on the recollections of people who had known the Duke. According to this, he was 'a man with his limbs well-built and straight'; spare and lean, 'he did not seem to have as much flesh as was required by the height of his body', yet he was vigorous and healthy, as befitted a warrior who played a prominent part in no fewer than a dozen military and naval campaigns, and had, according to Lopes, 'high majestic features and piercing eyes'. Surviving representations of 'this vial full of Edward's sacred blood' depict a hollow-cheeked, bearded man with the angular bone-structure and aristocratic aquiline nose of the Plantagenets. In youth, John probably

looked young for his years: in 1368, Chaucer thought he was twenty-four, when he was actually twenty-eight, but then he was 'not bushy-bearded at this stage'.

There are several surviving images that enable us to gain some idea of what John of Gaunt looked like. The earliest-known contemporary picture of him was in a mural depicting Edward III, his family and St George adoring the Virgin. This once adorned a wall at the eastern end of St Stephen's Chapel in the Palace of Westminster, and was painted after 1355, since Thomas of Woodstock, the King's youngest son, who was born that year, is included. In no sense were these portraits. Like his father and brothers, John appears in armour, kneeling. Although the faces of each of the eighteen-inch-high figures are all different, John's is a blank, for the paint had perished before the picture was copied. This mural, which had lain hidden under panelling for centuries, was discovered in 1800, only to be covered up again almost immediately, and then destroyed in the fire that burned down the palace in 1834. It is known only through coloured drawings made from tracings in 1800, which were engraved by Richard Smirke for the Society of Antiquaries of London.

John also appeared in armour on his tomb effigy, but the only surviving drawings of his lost tomb depict the effigy that replaced the original in the sixteenth century. His seal as King of Castile and Leon shows him enthroned, bearded and wearing a coronet over his chin-length hair. This is a conventional image of a king rather than a portrait.

There is a contemporary coloured miniature of John of Gaunt in the 'Liber Benefactorum' of St Albans Abbey, which dates from c.1380. This shows him at prayer, wearing a long gold and pink robe embroidered in red, with a gold collar, four large buttons down the front, red undersleeves and red boots; he sports wavy reddish-brown hair — again chin-length — crowned by a gold coronet, wears a fashionable forked beard and has somewhat florid features, the delineation of which suggests that the artist, a lay illuminator called Alan Strayler, knew what his subject looked like. John was about forty at this time.

There are posthumous stained-glass portraits of John of Gaunt in the chapel of All Souls College, Oxford, which was executed in 1437, and in the St Cuthbert memorial window in York Minster, which dates from c 1440. Parts of the head in the All Souls glass were replaced in the seventeenth century, but in both windows he is portrayed with the

same forked beard as in the St Albans miniature, and bears a remarkable resemblance to his father, Edward III, as he appears in the effigy on his tomb in Westminster Abbey. The small statue of John as a weeper on that tomb, which dates from the same period as the St Albans miniature, also shows him with a forked beard and long gown. The beard would have been kept trimmed by the Duke's barber, Godfrey.

A panel portrait in oils of John of Gaunt, wearing armour and helm, in which his finely chiselled facial features bear a striking similarity to those in other representations of him, is in the collection of his descendant, the Duke of Beaufort, at Badminton. Once thought to have been painted from life in 1390, it is now known to have been executed between 1600 and 1650. It is ascribed to a Dutch artist called Luca Cornelli, of whom nothing more has been discovered; it was once claimed erroneously that he was a court painter to Henry VIII. There is a possibility that this vivid portrait is based on a lost original; interestingly, John is identified by his arms as King of Castile and Leon, and by the heraldic symbols of those kingdoms — a castle and three lions. As he renounced his claims to Castile and Leon in 1388, one would expect any later portrait to refer to him simply as Duke of Lancaster, so this portrait might possibly be a copy of one that was executed from life before 1388. Richard II, in whose reign such an original would have been painted, pioneered the novel art of royal portraiture in England, commissioning, in c.1395 or later, the Wilton Diptych and the commanding full-length portrait of himself enthroned that is now in Westminster Abbey. There may well have been other portraits of the King that have not survived, so it is not beyond the bounds of belief that an artist working in England under his patronage might also have painted John of Gaunt, the foremost lord in the realm, and that this is a copy of that lost original. Alternatively — since the pose is more typical of the seventeenth than the fourteenth century - the artist could have used John's funeral effigy in St Paul's as a model.

John dressed stylishly and elegantly, even magnificently, but there was an element of well-bred restraint about his clothes, unusual in that age of brash display. 'His garments were not full wide,' observed Thomas Hoccleve, but they did reflect his elevated status; like most aristocrats of the period, he loved ceremony, ritual and the outward trappings of rank.

John was reserved and dignified in character, a proud man who was ever conscious of the *gravitas* of his high estate. According to the

laudatory Chandos Herald, he 'had many virtues'. Courteous and charming, he 'spoke well, very measured, temperately and with good judgement, being self-controlled and good-humoured'. Skilled in logic and rhetoric, he was a powerful orator and accomplished at debating; Froissart calls him 'wise and imaginative', and the author of the *Anonimale Chronicle* describes him arguing his point in Parliament 'in good form, as if he was a man of law'. Edward III himself paid tribute to the 'probity, activity and excelling wisdom of his dearest son John'. A great traditionalist, the Duke was conventional in his tastes and outlook, and reactionary in his views. Rarely did he abuse his power. Instead, he was liberal, generous, prudent, thoughtful and above all possessed of a strong sense of honour and firm principles. He never shirked his obligations or responsibilities, nor failed in his duty. He was applauded for his sense of fair play, and once won golden opinions when he threatened to hang a cheating duellist as a traitor.⁸⁰ For him, the laws of chivalry were sacrosanct, and he tried all his life to remain true to his knightly oath while modestly protesting, 'I am no great knight myself.' Yet, he added, 'My greatest delight is hearing of gallant deeds of arms.'⁹⁰

The Duke did not take kindly to criticism or to being contradicted. When provoked, he was quick to explode with anger or act on impulse, being 'jealous of honour, sudden and quick in quarrel'. He was capable of using 'great harsh words' in Parliament, and could be peremptory when giving orders: 'Get this done without any slip-up,' he once commanded, or 'Make sure this is done in such a manner, understanding that, if it is disrupted, we would not wish to impute the blame to you; and do not neglect this, as you wish to avoid upsetting us.' His grand manner often made him appear haughty, autocratic, aloof and even intimidating, which did not endear him to his envious contemporaries, and alienated a number of his fellow nobles. But he cared little for that — public opinion was rarely of concern to him. Because of his wealth and power, he had no need to court favour or heed resentment.

Chaucer, however, found John to be a 'wonder and well-faring knight' who was 'so treatable, right wonder skilful, and reasonable' that he put the poet at his ease 'and got me acquaint with him'.⁹³

How kindly spoke this knight, Without false style or sense of rank; ... I felt that he was too frank, And found him most approachable, And very wise and reasonable.

This suggests that John was more relaxed and outgoing amongst those

he knew well. He could be engagingly self-deprecating, candidly confessing to his own faults, such as having 'a head and memory feeble at remembering'. And he was willing to be flexible, and to heed advice that ran contrary to his own inclinations.⁹³

John was undoubtedly ambitious. His birth, connections, wealth and landed status made him an important player, not only on the English political stage, but in the arena of European politics, where he was to carve out for himself a major role. In the future, ill-informed people in England, misled by his overbearing hauteur and chstnistful of his vast power and wealth, would often express suspicion of John's ambition and where it might lead him; whereas abroad, it was a different story, for these very characteristics made him widely admired throughout Europe. But the distrust was misplaced, for his loyalty to the Crown, and his patriotism, were astonishingly unshakeable, and he was, all his life, a mighty champion and defender of royal authority and prestige. 'The King had no more faithful servant than himself, and he would follow wherever he would lead.'

John's loyalty and steadfastness extended to his friends also, and it was evident even when such friendships compromised his reputation, as was the case with John Wycliffe. He was true and decent to his family too, and set much store by 'the natural ties of kinship'. He clearly held his parents and siblings in deep affection and respect; he became a devoted and caring father, and he was to prove steadfast in love for many years to two women in turn. He was generous to them, and to those close to him: much of the money in his privy purse went on personal gifts carefully chosen by himself.

Although he was not violent by nature - unlike his brother the Black Prince — John was a courageous, dedicated and energetic soldier. 'His campaigns were always physically arduous to himself,' wrote Froissart. He was also a competent and prudent commander who was at his best when laying siege to a town. But for various reasons, not all his fault, military success continually eluded him, and he was to prove far more fortunate and productive in the fields of diplomacy and politics than as a military leader, for he possessed 'admirable judgement' and 'a brilliant mind'. Nonetheless, Froissart ranked him with Edward III, the Black Prince and Duke Henry among the 'valiant *chevaliers*' of the age.

'The pious Duke', as the admiring Knighton calls him, was a devout Catholic with orthodox views, and as conventional in his observance of religion as he was in all other things. He evinced a deep devotion to his patron saint, St John the Baptist, St Cuthbert and the Virgin

Mary.⁹⁸ A hugely generous benefactor, he endowed monastic houses, collegiate churches and friaries — the Carmelites were especially favoured by him, and he chose all his confessors from their Order. He was also a munificent patron of St Albans Abbey, and in its 'Liber Benefactorum', it is recorded that 'this Prince had an extreme love and affection for our monastery and Abbot, and greatly enriched the church with his magnificent and oft-repeated oblations'. He sent food and firewood to poor parish priests in his domains, rebuilt their churches and parsonages, and ensured they were kept in repair. However, his concern about abuses within the Church and his resentment of the corrupt power of wealthy ecclesiastics led him to adopt an anti-clerical stance that was to prove controversial.

In his leisure hours, John loved above all to go hunting; he owned numerous chases, forests and parks, and took great pains to keep them well maintained, and his itinerary was usually tailored to availing himself of their sport at the appropriate season.¹⁰⁰ He was equally passionate about falconry, and his mews, stocked with costly birds, were renowned throughout Europe.

Where indoor pursuits were concerned, John enjoyed games of dice, and like Blanche, he had literary interests. He was indeed an intelligent, cultivated and accomplished man with refined and sophisticated tastes. In youth, Chaucer tells us, he had studied 'science, art and letters'. He shared an interest in astronomy with Chaucer himself and with Joan of Kent, and in 1386 Nicholas of Lynn dedicated his *Kalendarium* to John.

The Duke patronised artists, funded poor scholars at the universities, was an active patron of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and appointed masters to grammar schools. He loved music, and employed talented choristers, musicians and minstrels in his chapel and household. To judge by their names, his company of minstrels were of Flemish or Hainaulter origin. His musicians played on the pipes, clarions and 'nakers', an early form of kettle drum, the drumsticks being of silver. According to Chaucer, John, in his youth, wrote songs that he himself admitted 'fell short'.

He spoke Norman French on a daily basis, read French with ease, had a good grasp of English — in 1363, he became the first person ever to open Parliament in that language — and must have learned some Hemish from his mother, but he was also apparently well tutored in Latin, and enjoyed reading the classics as well as contemporary romance literature; we have seen that he kept a library at the Savoy,

although there is no surviving record of its contents. He is not known to have directly patronised Chaucer, but he would have been familiar with his works, for reasons that will shortly become clear, and Chaucer probably wrote *The Boke of the Duchesse* with him in mind, knowing that he and his circle would appreciate its literary significance and understand its allegorical and mythological allusions. Chaucer later addressed a short poem entitled 'Fortune' to 'three or two' princes — probably John and his brothers Edmund of Langley and Thomas of Woodstock - in the knowledge that they would know who he was talking about when he referred to Socrates; and it was claimed in the fifteenth century, by the copyist John Shirley, that John himself had commissioned another of Chaucer's poems, 'The Complaint of Mars', although this cannot be substantiated.

It has been suggested too that it was John who commissioned the epic courtly poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which was written in York or the northern Midlands, in Lancastrian territory, possibly around 1375, but again, there is no proof to support this claim. John could certainly discriminate between good and bad poetry — when a monk, Walter of Peterborough, seeking a reward, dedicated a dreadful piece of doggerel to him in 1367, the Duke pointedly ignored it.

This was the 'magnificent lord' whose wife Katherine now served, and whose children she would care for. She must have seen and perhaps conversed with him frequently when he was at home and visiting the Duchess's apartments, or presiding over meals in the great hall, and doubtless she was as in awe of him as most people were. She was, after all, just a young teenager at the time. She may well have found him attractive and admired him from afar, yet there is nothing to show that she was anything to him at this time. Quite the contrary, for the evidence we have strongly suggests that he had eyes only for his beautiful wife. Katherine could therefore never have dreamed that the Duke's fancy would one day fix itself upon her, and anyway, she had other things to preoccupy her mind, not the least of which was marriage.

'The Trap of Wedding'

By 1363, Katherine de Roët had entered her teens, and her beauty, which would one day be so famous, was becoming evident. The epitaph on John of Gaunt's tomb in Old St Paul's Cathedral, which was lost in the Great Fire of 1666, described Katherine as *eximia pulchritudine feminam* — 'extraordinarily beautiful and feminine'. This epitaph was not contemporary but was placed on the restored sepulchre in the reign of Henry VII, who was desirous of restoring the good reputation of this rather dubious ancestress. It is unusual to find words of this kind in an epitaph — the emphasis is usually on virtue and good works - but since Henry VII could hardly laud Katherine's virtue, it is possible that he ordered reference to be made to her beauty because it was one of the things that people did remember her for, and it may even have been referred to in the original tomb inscription, which had been destroyed well within living memory.

It has long been claimed that there are no adequate surviving pictorial representations of Katherine. The only one we can say for certain is meant to be her is Dugdale's crude seventeenth-century sketch of her lost brass in Lincoln Cathedral, done before the desecrations of the Civil War. In no way could this be described as a portrait. It is a formalised line drawing of a woman in a widow's veil and wimple.'

Two tiny carved heads in the Pulpitum in Canterbury Cathedral, each no bigger than a walnut and dating from around 1400, have been identified — on questionable grounds — as Katherine Swynford and John of Gaunt. They are said to have closed eyes to indicate that both had passed away, but this may be a fanciful interpretation because pupils were not always incised in facial sculpture of the period. Two of John of Gaunt's sons were later buried in the cathedral, but in both cases some while after the probable date of these carvings, so no link is feasible.

Even if this identification were correct, neither head could be said to be a portrait.

Because we have a good idea of what John of Gaunt looked like, we might search for evidence of physical features perhaps inherited from

Katherine in the surviving tomb effigies of three of their children. These may be fairly accurate likenesses, for from the fourteenth century, sculptors attempted to portray their subjects realistically: the effigies of Philippa of Hainault, Edward III (which was based on his death mask), Richard II and Anne of Bohemia are good examples. It has been claimed that a portrait of a cardinal by Jan Van Eyck is Katherine's son, Henry Beaufort, and while that attribution cannot be proved, the face is round and fleshy, whereas John of Gaunt's was long and thin, with aquiline features and a straight nose that were inherited by his daughter Elizabeth and his great-granddaughter, Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII. By contrast, the effigies of Katherine's children all have round or oval faces, which they perhaps inherited from their mother.

Writers and historians have long — and fruitlessly — searched the poems of Chaucer for allusions to his famous sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford. Silva-Vigier, in her biography of John of Gaunt, thought it was not fanciful to suggest that the young Katherine was the model for the beautiful Virginia, the heroine of *The Physician's Tale*.

The maiden was fourteen, on whose array

Nature had spent her care with such delight.

For, just as she can paint a lily white,

Redden a rose and teach it to unfurl

Her petals, so she touched this noble girl

Ere she was born; her limbs so lissom she

Had touched with colours where they ought to be;

Phoebus her mass of tresses with a gleam

Had dyed in burnish from his golden stream;

And if her beauty was beyond compare,

Her virtue was a thousand times more rare.

Sadly, there is nothing in these lines specifically to link them to

Katherine. By the time they were written, her affair with John of Gaunt was notorious, and her reputation such that Chaucer could hardly have got away with that last line. Nor does the poem tell us much about Virginia save that she was beautiful and golden-haired, attributes that could probably have been possessed by several young girls Chaucer knew.

Yet Katherine too may have been golden-haired, and we may indeed possess something approaching a likeness of her. An early-fifteenth-century illuminated frontispiece to a manuscript of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*⁵ shows the poet reciting his work to the court of Richard II. The identity of the courtiers ranged about him has been the subject of much learned discussion: one of the figures is clearly supposed to be King Richard (with the face rubbed out); his first queen, Anne of Bohemia, is said to be next to him, wearing a pink gown; one of the five well-dressed men in the foreground is probably John of Gaunt; and a lady in a blue gown trimmed with ermine, kneeling in the front, has been tentatively identified as Joan of Kent, the King's mother.⁵ It has also been suggested that the lady seated next to her, who is attired in a flowing blue gown called a *houppelande*, which has long hanging sleeves, a wide stand-up collar lined with white fabric, and a gold girdle clasped beneath the breasts, is Katherine. She has a round face, fashionably high forehead and blonde plaits coiled high above each temple and roped around the crown of her head.

There are problems with this theory. Chaucer wrote *Troilus and Criseyde* probably between 1385 and 1388, by which time Joan of Kent was dead. Even so, the manuscript was not produced until early in the fifteenth century, so it would be likely to depict courtiers who were prominent towards the close of Richard II's reign. The lady in pink next to the faceless man identified - probably correctly - as Richard may actually be his child-queen, Isabella of Valois; it was common for children to be represented as adults in an age that did not fully understand realism or perspective. Almost certainly John of Gaunt is one of the five well-dressed men, probably the dignified bearded man in striking red robes standing to the left. At the end of Richard's reign, Katherine was his duchess, and as such the second lady in the land; thus the prominent female figure in the ermine-and-gold-trimmed tight-fitting blue gown, whose dress clearly marks her out as being a royal lady of some importance, must be her. The fair girl in blue to the left, hitherto tentatively identified as Katherine Swynford, looks too young to be a woman of at least forty-six; her position next to Katherine Swynford, who has an arm around her, and

in front of the man who may be John of Gaunt, suggests she was perhaps their daughter, Joan Beaufort; indeed, her image bears a close resemblance to Joan Beaufort's tomb effigy, which suggests that the painter had seen his subjects.

Other evidence supports this identification: in the fifteenth century, the manuscript was owned by Joan's daughter, Anne Neville, Countess of Stafford, having probably been bequeathed to her by Joan, Chaucer's own niece, for whom it had almost certainly been made.⁷ It would therefore be natural for Joan's parents to be conspicuously depicted in it, and for Joan to be shown with them. Later evidence (which will be discussed elsewhere) strongly suggests that Joan was committed to rehabilitating Katherine's reputation, and emphasising her mother's importance as second lady in the realm by having her portrayed as the most prominent female figure in the picture would be a logical consequence of this.

Bearing this in mind, there are sound reasons for believing that this ermine-and-blue-clad lady in the *Troilus* frontispiece is Katherine, and thus we may have come, at last, face to face with her. If so, she was fair-haired and buxom, with a tiny waist, high stomach and wide hips, a woman ideally proportioned to suit fashionable notions of the female figure in that era. Her neck was long, her face round with a high forehead, and her hair elegantly swept up and pinned beneath a golden coronet, which in itself identifies her rank. If she looked as voluptuously handsome as this when she was in her late forties, it is easy to see why John of Gaunt had been so taken with her charms a quarter of a century earlier, and why her beauty became legendary.

Much of what we can glean of Katherine's character and interests has to be inferred from the fragmentary sources that have come down to us; we have to look beyond the scathing criticisms of monastic chroniclers shocked by her liaison with the Duke to the sounder evidence to be found in less sensational records. It is noteworthy that her worst critics, Thomas Walsingham and the anonymous author of the *Anonimale Chronicle*, were men who did not know her personally, while Walsingham had an ulterior motive for reviling her, as will become clear. Henry Knighton, the Leicester chronicler whose house was under the patronage of John of Gaunt, and who may well have met Katherine, has nothing really bad to say about her personally, and it is clear that she maintained good relations with the Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral throughout her adult life, and that they were happy to lease a house to her during the years of her ill fame.

In fact, most of what we can surmise or know of Katherine Swynford suggests she was a remarkable, attractive, fascinating and sympathetic woman. An early request for a private altar strongly suggests a devout religious faith instilled in childhood. By contrast, her long love affair with John of Gaunt implies allure, sensuality, charm, loyalty, emotional depth, and perhaps forwardness and a degree of ambition. She must have relished the material benefits that were to come her way as a result of John's devotion, but she does not seem to have been the most demanding of mistresses, and it is doubtful if she was driven very much by mercenary motives: her love for John was to survive concealment, long separations, social ostracism and public vilification, which argues that it was deep and true. Her admirable discretion and tact helped smooth the path of the lovers, and when tragedy and loss struck, she had sufficient wisdom and strength of character to survive with dignity. We will learn that she cherished strong family ties and was concerned about how others saw her. She was to prove capable, responsible, caring and successful in nearly all her enterprises.

A warm and kindly heart may be evident in Katherine's lasting love for John, and in her apparent affection for children, her own and all those who came into her orbit. She was clearly good with the young, and had, it seems, an innate sensitivity that made it possible for her to create unity from disparity - witness the successful bonding of the legitimate heirs of the House of Lancaster with Katherine's own children, her bastards by John of Gaunt, and the Chaucers, bonds that surmounted the barriers and taboos created by adultery, death, rank and illegitimacy. Much of this was doubtless due to the powerful influence of the Duke, but Katherine herself must surely also take a great deal of the credit for it.

All this suggests that Katherine learned much from the examples and influence of Queen Philippa and the Duchess Blanche. Froissart said of her in later life that she was 'a woman of such bringing up and honourable demeanour' that she was 'well-deserving' of the respect of those about her. The undoubted esteem in which she was held in the Lancastrian household, and by three kings of England, argues that her integrity and other qualities were recognised, and that she was skilled in courtly accomplishments, sophisticated in her tastes, sociable, courteous, literate, intelligent and a good conversationalist. She would have needed to have been most of these things to become such a respected member of the Duchess's entourage, and later to attract and hold the attention of the Duke. She would also have absorbed the cultivated ambience of the ducal court, in which John of Gaunt actively promoted the education of women and encouraged a love of

learning in his wives and daughters.⁹

It was not unusual for members of royal households to marry each other, nor was it surprising that the husband chosen for Katherine de Roët, a servant of the Duchess of Lancaster, should have been a retainer of the Duke of Lancaster. His name was Sir Hugh Swynford, and he was lord of the manors of Coleby and Kettlethorpe in Lincolnshire. The choice of Hugh Swynford suggests that the marriage was arranged by the Duke himself at his wife's instance. Possibly Queen Philippa was consulted, for it was she who had placed the Roët girl with the Lancasters. Marriage to one of John of Gaunt's retainers would certainly have strengthened Katherine's ties to the House of Lancaster.

The Swynford family was an old one, although claims that its ancestry could be traced back to Anglo-Saxon time are unsubstantiated. Hugh's forebears probably came from Swinford - originally Swine's Ford — in Leicestershire, but there is no record of them there in Domesday Book. The family had many branches, and there are numerous references in mediaeval records to its early members, but attempts to discover their exact relationships and make any sense of the family genealogy prior to the fourteenth century have so far proved largely fruitless.

The only one of Hugh's forebears of whose relationship to him we can be certain is his father, Sir Thomas Swynford, who was probably the son of Sir Robert de Swynford of Burgate, Suffolk, whose arms were the same three gold boars' heads on a field of silver as Sir Hugh Swynford displayed. By 1343, Sir Robert Swynford had sold the manor of Burgate; this would have left his heirs landless, and might well explain why, in August 1345, Sir Thomas Swynford acquired from the de Cuppledyke family⁴ the manor of Coleby in Lincolnshire, which he held in chief of the King and in part of John of Gaunt, in whose Honour of Richmond it lay.

Sir Thomas married Nichola, the widow of Sir Ralph Basset of Weldon. From the mid-1340s until 1356, we find him appointed in turn to the shrievalties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Rutland, while in 1344 he was a Commissioner of the Peace in Bedfordshire, and in 1345-7 an escheator for that county and for Buckinghamshire.⁷ Far from keeping the peace, he appears to have rather thrown his weight about: in 1356, he and his falconers caused chaos hunting pigeons on the manor of Barton, in defiance of the reeve's protests.

That year, Thomas bought from John de la Cray (or Croix) the manor

of Kettlethorpe in Lincolnshire, which was to become the chief seat of the Swynfords until 1498; it would also be Katherine's marital home and become forever associated with her. Kctdethorpe was not far from Coleby, which Thomas had held since 1345. In 1357, Thomas and Nichola settled permanently in Lincolnshire, where Sir Thomas again served as a Commissioner for the Peace.

Hugh Swynford - who is incorrecdy named as Otes Swynford in Weever's description of the inscription on Paon de Roët's tomb in St Paul's, in which Philippa de Roët is erroneously called Anne — had been born in 1340 at the latest; his father's Inquisition Post Mortem of December 1361, taken in Lincoln, gives his age as twenty-one years and more.² This made him at least a decade older than Katherine, and possibly the same age as his master the Duke.

Hugh was a soldier by profession — 'a shrewd and terrifying fighter' — and would appear to have begun his career in royal service as a retainer of the Black Prince, for in 1356, he had fought under the Prince at Poitiers, and perhaps been knighted afterwards. It was probably after the Black Prince removed to Aquitaine in 1361 that Hugh had transferred to the retinue of his feudal overlord, the Duke of Lancaster, to whom he owed knight's service. It was as well he did so, for when his father, Sir Thomas Swynford, died on 3 November 1361, Hugh came into only a poor inheritance, and would have badly needed the money he received as the Duke's retainer and any profits he could make from campaigning. He would also, almost certainly, soon have begun looking about him for a wife to bear him heirs and hopefully boost his social standing and his finances. He had little to offer beyond his knightly status, so Katherine de Roët, the alluring object and recipient of royal esteem and favour, with her family connections and her inheritance in Hainault, would probably have appeared an ideal choice.

For a long time, basing their conclusions on the likely birth date of her son, historians assumed that Katherine was married to Sir Hugh Swynford around 1366—7. Yet we know that she was the mother of a daughter called Blanche, who was old enough to be placed in the train of the Lancastrian princesses before 1368, and it appears that Katherine was probably also the mother of one Margaret Swynford, who was of sufficient age to become a nun in 1377. Of course, girls sometimes entered convents in their tender years - witness Mary, a daughter of Edward I, who became a novice at Amesbury Abbey in 1284, aged six; or Bridget, the youngest daughter of Edward IV, who was perhaps seven when she was placed in Dartford Priory around

1487. But it was more usual for girls to be adolescents of thirteen or fourteen at the time of their reception.²⁶ It would seem that there was a tradition of offering Roët daughters to God - witness the cloistering of Elizabeth de Roët and the eldest daughter of Katherine's sister Philippa; therefore, if Margaret became a nun at the usual age, and Blanche was the eldest child of Katherine and Hugh, the Swynfords are likely to have been married no later than 1362, not long after Hugh came into his inheritance and Katherine reached marriageable age. Certainly they were joined in wedlock before 24 January 1365, as an entry of that date in Bishop Buckingham's register refers to Katherine by her married name. Their marriage may have taken place in one of the ducal chapels - even perhaps the magnificent chapel of the Savoy.

Once married, Katherine's arms of three silver wheels on a red background would have been displayed impaling those of her husband, which were three golden boars' heads on a black chevron with a silver background. These are the arms that appeared on her seal of c. 1377, which no longer survives.

It used to be said that Katherine married into an ancient landed aristocratic house. Although it is true that the Swynford family was old-established in Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Essex and Suffolk, it was hardly landed and certainly not aristocratic, for its members never rose above the rank of knight. In fact, Hugh was impoverished. He held only two manors, neither of which was profitable, and both had been recently acquired by his father³ — hardly ancient wealth by any reckoning, as Katherine was to find out when Hugh first took her to his manor house at Kettlethorpe, which after his marriage he held jointly with his new wife of the King and John Buckingham, Bishop of Lincoln.

Kettlethorpe was to become inextricably linked to Katherine in her own lifetime; for forty years she was known as the Lady of Kettlethorpe, and her memory is very much alive there today for the many visitors who make the journey — some would say pilgrimage — to this pretty, quiet but rather isolated Lincolnshire village, which is situated about twenty feet above sea level, and lies twelve miles west of Lincoln, just north of the border with Nottinghamshire. The River Trent flows west of Kettlethorpe, and the Fossdyke meanders along its eastern and northern boundaries. It is 'a romantic spot, embowered by trees'.³³

The manor took its name from a Viking who is said to have settled

there in the ninth century, Lincolnshire being part of the Danelaw in Saxon times. His name was Ketil, and the place he lived in became known as Ketil's Thorpe (or village), which over time became corrupted to Kettlethorpe. There is no mention of the settlement in Domesday Book, so it must have been very small, if indeed it still existed in 1086, in which case, the story of the Viking settler may have been an oral tradition preserved in local places such as nearby Newton-on-Trent, which is on record as a Domesday village. In fact, there is no mention of Kettlethorpe in historical documents until 1220. The de la Cray family had come into possession of it by 1287.

The present Kettlethorpe Hall incorporates fragments of the mediaeval house that Katherine knew, and is still surrounded by a moat. All that survives of the original hall are interior walls in the two barrel-vaulted cellars, the remains of a passage from those cellars that is reputed to have led to the church opposite, a blocked fourteenth-century doorway and some stonework on the southern elevations, a few carved heads and, standing apart, a ruined yet imposing fourteenth-century embattled and buttressed stone gatehouse with sunken mouldings, a survival probably from the 1370s, when Katherine was converting Kettlethorpe into a residence of some magnificence. The gatehouse was reconstructed in the early eighteenth century, but not entirely successfully: the lower stones were reassembled authentically enough, but the upper parts owe much to the imagination of the builder who carried out the restoration. To the left is a mediaeval mounting-block, three steps high. We might imagine Katherine standing by it with a stirrup cup, bidding Sir Hugh farewell as he rode off to war.

When Katherine came to Kettlethorpe, after living in luxurious royal palaces since her childhood, she must surely have been dismayed by its poverty. The place was in serious disrepair. Even in 1372, after she had lived there on and off for the best part of a decade, it was 'ruinous, and the land sandy and stony and out of cultivation'; the only crops it would support were hay, flax and hemp, while the meadow was frequently flooded by the overflow from the nearby River Trent.

As lord of the manor, Hugh had the right to appoint priests to the twelfth-century parish church of St Peter and St Paul that stood to the north of the house, a privilege that Katherine herself would one day exercise; in March 1362, Hugh presented one Robert de Northwood as rector. Katherine would have had frequent dealings with Northwood, who may have acted as her confessor when she was at Kettlethorpe; and because the manor population was small, she probably came to

know everyone else quite well too.

Kettlethorpe had appurtenances in the nearby villages of Laughterton, Newton-on-Trent and Fenton, all of which lay about a mile distant in different directions. In all, the Swynford holdings in the area comprised around three thousand acres, most of which was forest — prime hunting ground for the lords of the manor.³⁵ And we may be certain that when she was not pregnant, Katherine, like most ladies of rank, rode out with her husband and helped to put food on the table.

Kettlethorpe was Sir Hugh Swynford's chief residence, but not far off was his manor of Coleby, which was spectacularly perched high up on the Lincoln Cliff escarpment, and commanded beautiful views of the Witham valley. It lay seven miles south of Lincoln, to the west of Ermine Street, the old Roman road that ran from London to Lincoln and York. The manor, which Hugh and Katherine now held jointly, was divided into two equal parts, each comprising roughly ninety acres of land and fifteen acres of pasture. In 1367, it was recorded that the part of this manor known as the South Hall, or Southall, which yielded 54s.4d (£785) each year in rents paid by free tenants, was held of John of Gaunt as Earl of Richmond by service, or rent, of 2s (£29) per annum or 'a sorrel sparrowhawk'. The other part of the manor, the North Hall, or Northall, was held in chief of the King, by service of half a knight's fee; as far back as 1086, the manor of Colebi' had been recorded in Domesday Book as the property of the Crown. Earlier, like Kettlethorpe, it had been a Danish settlement, under a man called Koli, from whom it took its name; and earlier still, it may have been colonised by the Romans, for it is near Ermine Street and Roman coins have been found in the vicinity. Much later, in the twelfth century, the manor had been held by William the Lyon, King of Scots. At that time, a Gilbertine priory dedicated to St Katherine was established in the village. A windmill - probably one of several — was in existence in 1361.

Hugh could never have relied on receiving the rents due from his Coleby tenants, for there was little prospect of any yield, let alone a surplus, from the land, which was poor. In 1361, when he inherited it, Coleby was a dismal place, worth only 37s.10d (£601), less than a third of its value when Sir Thomas Swynford had bought it in 1345. 'The soil is hard, stony and uncultivated because of its barrenness, the dovecote and windmill are in ruins', and no profit could be raised from them until they were repaired; the meadow was hard, choked with brambles and too dry to be of any benefit. Given these circumstances, Hugh's tenants may not always have found the means

to pay their rents, which might explain why, a decade later, in 1372, the manor was still barren and impoverished and worth nothing.

Apart from the Saxon church with its later mediaeval additions -the spire is fifteenth century — no buildings from Katherine's time survive in Coleby. The earliest is Old House in the High Street, which is Tudor. The original manor house was the North Hall, which lay two hundred metres north of the village, and had been built in the eleventh century by the then lady of the manor, Judith of Boulogne, Countess of Northumbria and Huntingdon, a niece of William the Conqueror and the ancestress of William the Lion. The present Coleby Hall, built in 1628, stands on the site of the North Hall, and its walls were raised on the stone foundations of the earlier building. In 1372, in a royal writ assigning Katherine her dower, the North Hall was described as having at the west end of its great hall 'a chamber called the West Chamber', a wardrobe for the storage of clothes, jewels and other personal items, and '*le faux chambre*', which literally translates as 'the false room'; one is tempted to wonder if this was just an alcove (which is not a proper room) or if there was a concealed room leading off the West Chamber. Underneath these chambers were cellars for the storage of provisions. There was a kitchen, which was perhaps at the eastern end of the hall, a cowhouse and an adjoining croft known as Belgarthes: 'the fair sward'. The western chambers of the hall overlooked part of the garden. Nearby was the Saxon church of All Saints." It was a far cry from the Savoy.

Only a few miles from Kettlethorpe and Coleby lies the great city of Lincoln, which Katherine came to know — and probably love — very well: her husband's family was well known in its civic society, she herself would reside there for several years, and at least one of her children was born there.

In the fourteenth century, Lincoln was a rich and prosperous city, dramatically situated on a high ridge. It was dominated by its castle, which had been built by William the Conqueror in 1068, and its spectacular cathedral. Between the two lay the upper town centre - 'the Bail' - and surrounding the cathedral was the walled close with its substantial clergy houses and splendid twelfth-century Bishop's Palace, which boasted three halls. The close was accessed from the Bail through the now-ruined Exchequer Gate. Just beyond the gate, Steep Hill sloped dizzyingly down to the lower parts of the town, which were known as 'the City', and on that hill stood two twelfth-century Norman houses, one of them the famous Jew's House, as well as several other notable buildings. The mediaeval Guildhall stood near

the bottom of Steep Hill. Lincoln was a great trading centre, annually hosted six fairs, and boasted fifty churches.

Lincoln Castle, in which extensive Norman buildings still survive within the walls, was then surrounded by deep ditches and high banks. Its main entrance was to the east, facing the Exchequer Gate, while the western gate of the castle led to open countryside. The shell keep was known as St Lucy's Tower, and stood on a mound raised around 1200. In the thirteenth century, a vaulted, horseshoe-shaped tower known as Cobb Hall had been inserted into the north curtain wall of the castle. In Katherine's day, the castle precincts were part of the Bail.

Lincoln Cathedral was at that time the third largest in England. The original Norman structure had been destroyed by a fire in 1141 and an earthquake in 1185, and had been rebuilt from 1192 onwards in the Early English style by St Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln. In Katherine's time the cathedral was a massive edifice with three Perpendicular towers and a magnificent west front adorned with myriad sculptured figures; solid on its high hill, it soared majestically over the city and could be seen for miles around. Pilgrims came flocking to make their devotions at the wondrous silver shrine of St Hugh, a masterpiece of intricate stone tracery encrusted with precious metals and gems, which reposed in the beautiful Angel Choir at the cathedral's east end; this choir had been built in the 1260s and was named after the carved angels with which it was lavishly decorated. For Hugh Swynford, the shrine of his patron saint must have been a very special place, to be visited often, while for Katherine, the cathedral had an altar to her own name-saint, and housed two precious objects of special devotion: a finger that had reputedly belonged to St Katherine, and a chain with which the saint is said to have bound up the Devil.

John of Gaunt also had strong links with Lincoln. At the age of two, he had been granted the earldom of Richmond, which incorporated lands in Lincolnshire. At three, he had come to Lincoln Cathedral with the King his father and his brother the Black Prince, and been admitted to its confraternity, a group of lay benefactors who were prayed for by the cathedral clergy in gratitude for their gifts; John was to prove very generous to the cathedral over the years, and in his will would refer to 'a certain devotion' he~ cherished for its patroness, the Virgin Mary. In the Angel Choir lay the visceral tomb of his great-grandmother, Eleanor of Castile, the beloved wife of Edward I. At twenty-one, John had acquired the earldom of Lincoln itself, with its vast estates, in right of his wife Blanche; in this capacity, he grew

familiar with the great and gentle families of the shire, and numbered several of their members among his retinue. He would in time forge even closer links to Lincoln and the surrounding area through his involvement with Katherine Swynford.

As Earl of Lincoln, John was hereditary Constable of Lincoln Castle, yet it is not known if he ever lodged in the castle on his brief visits to the city, or if he stayed in the Bishop's Palace, a house in the cathedral close or one in the town. It was perhaps the latter, since the castle could only offer somewhat outdated accommodation.

Tradition long had it that John of Gaunt owned a palace in Lincoln, an ancient stone mansion that stood to the west of the High Street in Wigford, a southern suburb of the city. The 'palace' was situated on the west side of the churchyard of the Guild of St Anne, which adjoined St Andrew's Church. According to an engraving of 1726 by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, it was a mediaeval house with stone pinnacles and windows of the Decorated period; beneath a gable in the centre of the extended battlemented front facade was affixed a carved freestone shield bearing the arms of John of Gaunt, surmounted by his helm and mantling. Another old print reveals that the south range of this house was built in the later Perpendicular style, possibly in the fourteenth century. It boasted buttresses, a battlemented cornice, and square-headed two-light windows.

All this would be commensurate with the house having existed in John's lifetime; probably it had been altered during the centuries since his death. Buck tells us that 'the castle was his, but standing much exposed to cold winds, and a place of office for the public service'; because of these drawbacks, 'that Prince probably built this below the hill for warmth, and for the use of his family and domestics, while he resided in this most ancient city'. Buck claims that John stayed here mainly in his latter years, and unsurprisingly, Katherine Swynford is also said to have had the use of the house.

There is little contemporary evidence to connect John of Gaunt with this building; nor did the early-sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland associate him with it; instead, he says this 'goodly house' belonged to the Suttons, who were the richest and most prominent mercantile family in Lincoln in the late Middle Ages and held lands of the Duke in the county. However, in 1586, the house was called 'John of Gaunt's Palace' by William Camden, the Elizabethan antiquary who spent fifteen years researching the historic buildings of England, and both Buck and the antiquary William Stukeley, writing in the 1720s,

refer to it by that name. But later, in 1784, a Swiss artist called Samuel Hieronymous Grimm labelled his drawing as 'the pretended house of John of Gaunt at Lincoln'. Today, historians are inclined to believe that it did not have any connection with the Duke.

John of Gaunt never stayed in Lincoln for long enough to justify the building of a residence there, and there is no reference to this house in his registers, but these are of course incomplete. Yet it was certainly his coat of arms that Buck engraved, and it is indeed possible that it was for reasons of comfort that John lodged in this house whenever he was in the city. That does not mean it belonged to him; the evidence suggests that he probably stayed there as a guest of his vassal, John de Sutton, who died in 1391, and then of Sutton's son Robert. John de Sutton, who was Mayor of Lincoln in 1387, certainly knew Katherine Swynford, because that year he witnessed a grant to her;⁴⁵ he was probably the owner of the house in Wigford, and was no doubt proud to display on it the arms of his overlord and honoured guest. It may be significant that the mansion boasted some of the innovative Perpendicular architectural features that were becoming fashionable at the end of the fourteenth century, the period when Buck says the Duke stayed there most frequently. One would expect to find such novel features only in the house of some great and wealthy man, who was eager to offer his lord the best accommodation that money and influence could provide.

These were the places that Katherine now called home: the impoverished manors of Kettlethorpe — for which she nevertheless conceived an enduring affection — and Coleby, where no trace of her remains, suggesting — perhaps understandably, in view of its penury — that she was rarely there. And of course Lincoln, where she was to live in far greater luxury than she could ever have dreamed at the outset of her marriage to Hugh Swynford.

What can we know or surmise about the marriage of Katherine and Hugh? Katherine was very young when they were wed, and Hugh was a soldier who would serve abroad on campaigns for long periods. There is no evidence to show whether the couple were happy or unhappy, although it is unlikely that Katherine found with her husband the kind of love that was between John of Gaunt and his Duchess. Marriages such as Katherine and Hugh's were matters of business or policy that took little account of personal feelings. Hugh wasn't wealthy — far from it — but he could provide Katherine with his knightly rank and social standing; on the other hand, living in poverty may well have put a strain upon the relationship. But

although Hugh is unlikely to have got much of a dowry with Katherine, if any at all, for him there was the advantage of a connection with a noble family, which would surely have inspired respect for his wife, and the prospect of her inheritance in Hainault, which may still have been in the hands of her father or brother at this time, for Hugh is not known to have attempted to take possession of it; and even if it had come to him on his marriage to Katherine, he was preoccupied with war and with rescuing his own estates from ruin, and would probably not have had the resources to administer and farm land in another country.

For Katherine, though, Kettlethorpe must have come as a shock after years of living in royal households where comfort and a laden table were taken for granted. It would appear that she faced this challenge with equanimity and resource, taking her responsibilities as lady of the manor seriously, which argues a certain strength of character. She would also have had to learn to juggle the demands of being the chatelaine of a knightly household and serving in the Lancastrian menage with successive pregnancies and a growing family. Being married at such a young age, like many girls of her caste, she had immediately to face the sometimes brutal realities of childbirth, living as she did in an era of high maternal and infant mortality; in this respect, she appears to have been quite hardy, for she was to survive at least seven or eight pregnancies with no apparent ill effects.

So in every aspect that mattered, Katherine made a success of her marriage. She clearly did her duty as a wife; she actively immersed herself in the life of the manor of Kettlethorpe, to such an extent that for many years she would be known primarily as the Lady of Kettlethorpe; she fitted seamlessly into her husband's social circle in Lincoln and the county at large, doubtless mixing too with his Swynford relatives and their connections by marriage; and she dutifully bore her husband the children that all men of property desired.

Their eldest child was probably Blanche, who is known to history through references in a papal petition, the Duchy records and a grant of wardship in *John of Gaunt's Register*. She was old enough by 1368 to be placed in the chamber of the Lancastrian princesses, probably as a playmate, and in view of the likely date of birth of her younger sister Margaret, must have been born no later than 1363. Margaret was the daughter who became a nun in 1377, and she probably arrived in 1364; Katherine was in attendance on the Duchess Blanche in January 1365, and later that year she perhaps became pregnant

with her third child.

Margaret may have been named for Margaret of Hainault, her grandfather's patroness. There is no actual record of her parentage, but several factors point to her being the daughter of Katherine and Hugh Swynford: first, her surname; second, the fact that she became a nun at Barking, one of the most exclusive abbeys in the land, and was nominated by the King himself, which suggests the influence of John of Gaunt, who was then the lover of Katherine Swynford; third, that the King, at the same time, nominated to St Helen's Priory in London Elizabeth Chaucer, who was probably the eldest daughter of Katherine's sister Philippa -which suggests a link between the two girls, and more influential manoeuvring behind the scenes; fourth, the possibility that Elizabeth Chaucer was later transferred to Barking because her cousin Margaret Swynford was there; fifth, there is evidence that two of Katherine's sons by John of Gaunt patronised Barking Abbey, in which Margaret, who was probably their half-sister, lived;⁴⁹ and last, the likelihood of Margaret's birth occurring at a time when Katherine was bearing children to Hugh Swynford.

It has been suggested that there was a third daughter, Dorothy. According to Thomas Stapleton, writing in 1846, Dorothy married Thomas Thimelby of Poolham near Horncastle, Lincolnshire, who was Sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1380 and died in 1390, but that claim is usually dismissed on the grounds that the name Dorothy was not used in England until the sixteenth century. That is incorrect: although uncommon, there are instances of English girls being named after the fourth-century Christian martyr St Dorothy of Cappadocia in mediaeval times, and she features in stained glass and screen paintings in England, particularly in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In fact, her legend had been known in England since Saxon times. St Dorothy's feast day is 6 February, which was perhaps the birthday of Katherine's daughter (who was possibly born in 1366), and might account for the unusual choice of name.

Evidence to support Stapleton's unsubstantiated claim is perhaps to be found in Irnham Church, where the coats of arms of the Thimelbys, the Belesbys, the Luttrells and Sir Hugh Swynford are to be found in abundance on tombs and in stained glass. All were prominent Lincolnshire families, and all were linked by marriage. Given the armorial evidence in the church, it is not therefore beyond the bounds of possibility that Thomas Thimelby married Dorothy Swynford, the daughter of Hugh and Katherine, nor that he had children by her, for there were Thimelbys still living at Poolham in the early seventeenth

century.

The dates of birth of the Swynford girls are not recorded — those of royal daughters born in this period are hard enough to come by, let alone those of knightly birth. It was often the mediaeval married woman's lot to bear a child each year, there being no effective birth control, so it was easily possible for Katherine to have borne Hugh four children in up to a decade of married life, even taking into account the periods he spent abroad. Since many children died in infancy, and the young were seen as marriageable assets, it was thought desirable, among the landed classes, to have as many as possible, so perhaps Katherine had unrecorded infants who did not survive.

In 1396, whilst affirming to the Pope that he had not committed adultery with Katherine during the lifetime of her husband, John of Gaunt revealed that he had stood godfather to one of her daughters by Hugh: 'Duke John had lifted from the sacred font a daughter of Katherine, begotten by another man.' In so stating, John was admitting an impediment to his marriage to Katherine, the creation of a fraternal bond of brotherhood, or compaternity, that effectively made them spiritually brother and sister. John also affirmed that 'the impediment of the aforesaid compaternity' was 'not notorious but rather occult', meaning that it was private or secret. This secrecy has seemed puzzling to some, since it suggests there was some sinister reason for preventing John's sponsorship from becoming public knowledge, and one conclusion that several writers have reached was that he was the baby's real father. This is highly unlikely. Apart from it being plainly stated in the petition that the baby had been 'begotten by another man', and the fact that a man could not stand godfather to his own child, John was later willingly to acknowledge four bastards by Katherine, who were all given the surname

Beaufort; why therefore should he not have acknowledged a fifth, and given it too that name? Even if this child had been born before the others, in Hugh's lifetime, there was no reason for concealment in 1396, and anyway, in his petition to the Pope, John admitted everything about his relationship with Katherine, even his own adultery: he kept nothing back.

In the circumstances, it would have been foolish and incomprehensible to do so. This petition was of the utmost importance. John wanted the Pope to confirm his marriage to Katherine and so legitimise their children. Had he lied in that petition,

it would have been self-defeating and catastrophic, for he risked receiving a flawed judgement from the Pontiff that would have nullified the validity of both the marriage and the legitimization process, not to mention imperilling his immortal soul by the anathema that would automatically have been visited upon him for lying. It is unthinkable that an intelligent and honourable man such as the Duke, who was clearly setting his affairs in order and safeguarding the future of his children — and who would have known what was at stake, both materially and spiritually — should have deliberately misrepresented his case to the Pope and courted damnation by so serious an omission. For even in the educated mediaeval mind, the prospect of divine judgement, purgatory and hell itself loomed large and terrifying. For this reason we must accept what John wrote in that petition as the truth.

The reason for keeping John's private sponsorship of Katherine's child a secret surely lies in the fact of the compaternity that resulted from it: by becoming her infant's godfather, he effectively placed himself within the forbidden degrees of affinity to Katherine, for compaternity bound parents and sponsors together in kinship, and created a barrier to them marrying or having sexual intercourse. His sponsorship would initially have been a kind gesture on the part of a good lord, an example of the patronage he extended to those who served him and his family well; it may have followed on from Katherine giving birth at one of the ducal residences, perhaps prematurely; it might have been at Blanche's request. And we may suppose that the baptism was only relatively ('rather') occult, a private affair attended just by the Duke and Duchess, a few members of their households, and the proud parents. It was only later, when Katherine became John's mistress, that the compaternity became a matter for concealment, for the lovers were no doubt aware that it laid upon them an additional burden of sin above that of adultery, and could only have intensified the scandal their affair was causing.

It has been convincingly suggested that it was Blanche Swynford to whom John stood godfather. In this capacity, he bound himself to take some responsibility for her spiritual needs and her material well-being, and his exalted rank would have conferred on her a special status. John seems to have ably fulfilled his obligations: in 1375, he granted Katherine the wardship of the heir of Sir Robert Deyncourt and the marriage of that heir for her daughter Blanche, thus effectively providing for Blanche's future as she approached marriageable age. And if the Duke was her godfather, the name Blanche, in honour of his wife - who might well have stood godmother

- was a natural choice. The Duchess Blanche too seems to' have taken a special interest in the little girl, for before 1368, she placed Blanche Swynford in the chamber of her own daughters. All these factors suggest that Blanche was the eldest child of Katherine and Hugh.

Like other married couples in the Lancasters' service, the Swynfords divided their time between the ducal court and their own estates, which were run by stewards and other feudal officials in their absence. Hugh would spend a considerable part of their married life campaigning in France and Spain, while Katherine — in between confinements — continued to serve the Duchess. Given the familial nature of the Lancastrian household, she would have been permitted to have her growing children with her, to be brought up in company with the ducal children.

Caring for the infants of the Duke and Duchess was probably a large part of Katherine's duties as a chamber servant.⁵⁸ Young Philippa and Elizabeth were growing sturdily. The elder John was probably dead by April or May 1366, when his brother and namesake was born: on 4 May that year, one Robert de Walkyngton was lavishly rewarded with [£6.13s.4d](#)

(£2,237) for bringing the news of the second John's birth to his grandfather the King.⁵⁹ But the second John also died young - probably after April 1367 — as did Edward of Lancaster, who had been born around 1365 and named probably for the King, and who departed this life soon afterwards. With the Duchess frequently pregnant, recovering from childbirth, or grieving over the loss of an infant, Katherine would have been kept busy. And she would surely have been caught up in the emotional life of the household, rejoicing in the births of new babies to the Duke and Duchess, sharing in their pain when their infants died, and doubtless observing the enduring love and devotion between them.

That Katherine had a genuine religious faith cannot be doubted. Shortly before 24 January 1365, John Buckingham, Bishop of Lincoln from 1363 to 1398, granted her, as *ancille* to the Duchess of Lancaster, the privilege of having divine Service — the canonical offices of the Church - celebrated privately until Pentecost of that year, whenever she visited Leicester.⁰¹ The bestowal of such a privilege, by a bishop who had doubtless come to know Katherine since she had married Sir Hugh Swynford and become prominent among the Lincolnshire gentry, proves that she was not only pious but

was an important and well-respected member of the Duchess's household. The performance of the divine offices would necessitate her having some personal space to facilitate it, such as a chapel, an oratory or even a private chamber, and she would have needed too a portable altar — a luxury item in those days. Servants in royal and noble households in the fourteenth century lived communally, sleeping in dormitories or in the chambers of their lords or ladies; privacy was the preserve of the rich. The fact that Katherine was granted this privilege and enjoyed sufficient privacy to take advantage of it, together with the Duke acting as godfather to her child and later rewarding her for good service to his wife, singles her out as one who was very highly favoured by her employers.

That said, it is unlikely that Katherine got to exercise her pious privilege. The ducal household was at Bolingbroke in Lincolnshire until 18 April 1365, then it moved south to the Savoy; it was still in residence there on 4 June, and did not arrive at Leicester until 14 June, some time after Pentecost, and too late for Katherine to have her private services.

By 12 September 1366, Philippa de Roët, Katherine's younger sister, had become the wife of Geoffrey Chaucer, now a Yeoman of the Chamber to Edward III; Chaucer must have been newly appointed to this post because his name does not appear in a comprehensive list of members of the royal household compiled in the summer of 1366; he was to hold it until 1372.

On that 12 September, Edward III issued letters patent granting a life annuity of ten marks (£1,119) to be paid twice yearly — to Philippa 'Chaucy'. A Chancery warrant of the same date describes her as 'Philippa Chaucer, one of the *damoiselles* of the Chamber of our very dear companion the Queen'.

Like Katherine and Hugh Swynford, the newly married Chaucers were both busily employed in a royal household; as we have seen, marriage between royal servants was not uncommon. Philippa's duties increasingly involved looking after the ailing Queen, while Geoffrey, when not serving the King on a personal basis, was to be entrusted with several sensitive diplomatic missions. On 20 June 1367, Edward III granted 'our beloved yeoman' Geoffrey Chaucer a pension of twenty marks (£1,926) a year for good service. His status is variously described, but the titles used - yeoman, valet (Latin, *valettus*, *valettorum*) or esquire (French, *esquier*) of the King's Chamber - were interchangeable at that time, and all meant the same thing: a civil

servant who performed confidential duties for his master as well as a wide range of tasks including the purveying of goods, the conveying of money, the making of beds, setting of tables or fighting of torches, as directed by the Chamberlain of the Household. Chaucer's manifold talents were already held in high regard by the royal family, and the likelihood is that his role as yeoman encompassed more responsible duties; there is evidence that in the spring of 1366, the year before he took up his new post, he had been sent to Spain on a secret diplomatic mission that was probably connected with dynastic turmoil in Castile, a matter that was to bear heavily on the fortunes of John of Gaunt. And in 1368, Chaucer was sent to France on official business. We might conclude, therefore, that his duties at court were by no means limited to domestic chores.

Geoffrey was remarkably clever and possessed of great charm, but his appearance belied that. Surviving pictures of him in later life show a rotund little man of about 5'6" with brown hair, a forked beard and dusty black garments. He was wise, tactful, discreet, shrewd and observant, and his understanding of human nature was profound. A well-read, objective scholar, a curious observer of life, he loved delving into the mysteries of science, astrology, philosophy and religion.

Thanks to his abilities and his discretion, Chaucer was to be able to use his talents in a variety of capacities, and would often be rewarded handsomely; his marriage to the daughter of a knight, a girl who was above him in station, was a measure of his early success. He knew Latin, Italian and French, and would undertake seven more diplomatic missions abroad for the King in the 1370s; in Italy, during that decade, he would perhaps meet those great literary colossi Petrarch and Boccaccio. In England, his royal service, and his marriage, gave him privileged access to the royal family.

Geoffrey's greatest gift, of course, was the ability to write wonderful rich, witty, earthy verse in the English language, a departure from the usual French poetry beloved in courtly circles. Yet the classical and allegorical themes of some of his works show that they were indeed meant to be circulated, read and enjoyed at court by a cultivated audience, and it would appear that by 1368 at the latest, Geoffrey had already earned himself a reputation as a maker of verses, and that his compositions were admired by John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster. His younger contemporary, the poet John Gower, tells us that 'in the flower of his youth', Chaucer was already enthralled the country with 'ditties and glad songs'. He was not the first to write

verse in English - although he was the first to use iambic pentameter, 'the golden couplet' - but it was he who was responsible for popularising poetry in the vernacular and he who, in so doing, ensured that in the decades to come, English would become the accepted literary language in England.

Geoffrey and Philippa were probably married well before September 1366. Their first child was almost certainly the daughter who would enter St Helen's Priory, London, in 1377; her name at that time was recorded as 'Elisabeth Chausier'. Her parentage is indicated by her surname (there was no regularity of spelling then), her likely date of birth, her placement in a convent that lay a stone's throw from her father's lodgings in Aldgate, and the fact that in 1381, John of Gaunt most generously dowered an 'Elizabeth Chaucy', who was almost certainly the same person, to the highly select Barking Abbey at a time when her aunt, Katherine Swynford, was his mistress. Elizabeth may even have been named after another aunt, the nun Elizabeth de Roët; as has been noted, the placing of Elizabeth de Roët, Margaret Swynford and Elizabeth Chaucer in convents may well indicate a family tradition of offering Roët daughters to God.

Given that she first became a nun in 1377, Elizabeth was presumably born no later than 1365, the year after Chaucer perhaps returned from Ireland. Thus her parents had probably married in 1364, possibly as soon as Philippa de Roët reached twelve, the minimum canonical age for girls to marry and have sex. The marriage was probably arranged by the Queen herself, who doubtless felt responsible for seeing the younger Roët girl safely disposed in wedlock and her future provided for. Within two years of it, Chaucer became a wealthy man, for his father died in 1366, leaving him all his property.

There was just possibly a second daughter of the marriage, and improbably a third. An Agnes Chaucer, who may have been a daughter or granddaughter of Geoffrey and Philippa, and was perhaps named for Chaucer's mother, is listed as one of the *damoiselles* of the Queen at the coronation of Henry IV in 1399; however, Henry IV was a widower at the time of his coronation, and his second wife, Joan of Navarre, was not crowned until February 1403, so there is something amiss here. And it was not until the seventeenth century that it was asserted that Chaucer had a daughter called Katherine - there is no contemporary record of her, so it is unlikely that she existed.

Living with a genius cannot always have been easy for Philippa. Geoffrey owned sixty books — an amazing number for a man in his

position — and he spent much of his leisure time reading them or foraging about in the many libraries in London. It has been suggested that he drew on his own experience when he depicted the frustrated Wife of Bath ripping up and burning her husband's books so that he would have more time for sexual dalliance. Yet although Geoffrey claimed to be primarily a bookish man, he was also a career civil servant, and perhaps came to have less and less time to spare for his wife. He could be devastatingly cynical, and a passage in *The Boke of the Duchesse* suggests he was also a compulsive worrier who would lie awake at night fretting. Thus the married life of Geoffrey and Philippa may not have been particularly harmonious. Late in life, after Philippa had died, Chaucer composed a humorous poem, 'L'Envoy a Bukton' (c.1396), for a bachelor friend of his, warning him of the sorrow and woe that is in marriage'. It was, he claimed, a deadly peril for all men, and he expressed the wish that his warning would prevent Bukton from rushing madly into the dire captivity of wedlock:

God grant you your life freely to lead

In freedom — for full hard it is to be bond.

From his tone, we might conclude that he had many regrets about his own marriage upon which he did not like to dwell. He ends by saying he is resolved not to fall into 'the trap of wedding' again.

We might infer from this, and other circumstances yet to be revealed, that his marriage had not been happy, a theory that may be supported by internal evidence from Chaucer's own verse. He is not known to have dedicated a single poem to Philippa, and most of his allusions to married life are cynical, ironical and disrespectful, hardly what one would expect from a man who enjoyed a loving relationship with his wife. Furthermore, Chaucer tells us in *The Boke of the Duchesse*, *The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls* and *Troilus and Criseyde* (to name a few) that he has no experience of love apart from what he has learned from books — 'I know not love in deed' — and his image of himself is that of an unprepossessing failure as a lover, one who is devout and chaste because he has been banished from love's courts. This self-deprecating portrayal may not be entirely truthful — how many men would wish to portray themselves as hopeless in bed? - and it could be merely the product of Chaucer's ironic humour, while his literary take on marriage might just reflect prevailing trends in popular humour. For in 'The Man of Law's Tale', he reveals that, despite his protestations elsewhere, he knows just how spiritually transcendental love between a man and a woman can be:

And such a bliss is there betwixt them two

That, save the joy that lasteth evermore,

There is none like that any creature

Hath seen or shall, while that the world may endure.

These read like the words of a man who has experienced such joy, yet although they refer to marital love, it is unlikely that Geoffrey and Philippa themselves enjoyed that kind of relationship, especially since Chaucer makes it clear he thought marriage a burden to be borne. No, his experience of love was of another kind entirely. In *The Boke of the Duchesse*, written probably in 1368, he reveals that he has been possessed with a great passion for an unnamed lady for no fewer than eight years. If this is true — and one theory will be discussed in the next chapter — then this passion must have pre-dated his marriage, and may well have contributed to its failure.

All we know of Philippa herself is that, according to her countryman Froissart, she had a fine sense of protocol, which she must have learned in the course of her upbringing in the Queen's household, and which would have served her well at court. Given the differences in their status, she may have looked down on her husband and inwardly despised his humbler birth; after all, he was just the son of a vintner, while she was the daughter of a knight, and in her veins there probably ran the blood of ancient royalty. Her sister Katherine had married a knight, and Philippa perhaps felt she had not done as well. The fact that she married beneath her is another argument in favour of her being the younger sister.

Philippa Chaucer may have been discontented with her marital lot to begin with, or she might gradually have become disillusioned. The demands of their official duties dictated that she and Geoffrey were frequently apart, and both possibly came to welcome this. Philippa was perhaps shrewish and sharp-tongued, for in *The House of Fame*, Chaucer has himself worshipping at the shrine of St Leonard, patron saint of hen-pecked husbands. And he speaks of a dream in which he is seized by an eagle's talons and awoken by the eagle's insistent cry, 'Awake!', which it speaks

Right in the same voice and pitch

That useth one I could name;

And with that voice, sooth for to say,

My mind came to me again,

For it was goodly said to me,

So has it never wont to be.

We might infer that the voice that awoke the poet was that of his wife. For once, though, she has spoken kindly to him, unlike her usual tone. In 'The Franklin's Tale', Chaucer may have been thinking of the deterioration of his marriage, and perhaps of a continual battle for conjugal supremacy, when he expresses the opinion that

Love is a thing as any spirit free. Women, of kind, desire liberty, And not to be constrained as a thrall; And so do men, if I sooth say shall. Look who that is most patient in love, He is at his advantage all above.

Of course, Chaucer, like many writers, may not have based his works on his own life and experiences, but on his observations of others, the books he had read or his own imagination. In assessing the nature of his marriage, we are entirely in the realms of speculation and educated guesses, and can conclude nothing concrete.

Marriage to Philippa de Roët must inevitably have brought Chaucer into contact with his sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford, and also, no doubt, with the Lancastrian household. He was, of course, already known to the Duke and Duchess, and we might infer from *The Boke of the Duchesse* that he was on friendly if formal speaking terms with both of them. There is also some evidence to suggest that for much of his life, Chaucer enjoyed John of Gaunt's patronage. Although there is no evidence to show that he was ever employed by the Duke, he later received a pension from him, in addition to the one he received from the Crown, and he may well have owed some, if not most, of the preferments that came his way to John's influence. His connection by marriage to Katherine Swynford, as well as his own talents and character, must in time have accounted to some degree for the Duke's favour.

The marriage of her sister to a valued member of the King's household

would inevitably have strengthened Katherine's ties with the court. And she would certainly have benefited personally from a close kinship with Chaucer, whose wisdom, humanity and erudition cannot but have made an impact on her young and impressionable consciousness. Her mind would have been broadened by his verses and tales, her imagination aroused, and her understanding of life challenged by his thoughtful insights.

In 1366, an event took place in Castile, a kingdom that spread across much of what is now Spain, which was to have far-reaching consequences for

John of Gaunt, and for Katherine Swynford too. That event was the deposition of King Pedro I, known as 'the Cruel'. His nickname was not undeserved, for he was a hard and sinister man of uncontrollable passions. Since his accession in 1350, he had ruled as an autocratic and bloody tyrant, determined to crush the power of his volatile and anarchic feudal nobles. He caused much scandal by protecting Jews and keeping a Jewish mistress, and by employing Infidels as his personal guard, predictably making many enemies in the process.

In 1353, Pedro had married Blanche of Bourbon, sister-in-law of the future French King, Charles V. Immediately after the wedding, though, Pedro repudiated their marriage, immured Blanche in a dungeon, and continued his long-standing liaison with his mistress, Maria de Padilla, whom he now claimed to have secretly married before he went through the ceremony with Blanche; so persuasive was he that the Castilian Cortes did in fact recognise Maria's children as his heirs, but sadly their only son, Alfonso, died aged eleven in 1362, his mother passing away the same year. Blanche had died in suspicious circumstances in 1361, and the evidence strongly suggests that the King had her poisoned. That was certainly what people were saying at the time, and if true, it was an ill-judged deed, for her death alienated the French and prompted the Pope to excommunicate Pedro for the murders of his wife and his many political opponents. These factors drove him to seek the friendship of the English.

It availed him little to begin with, because in 1366 he was overthrown by his bastard half-brother, Enrique of Trastamara, backed by Charles V of France, who saw in Enrique a future ally against England. The newly crowned Enrique II, a vigorous, able but unscrupulous man, was one of ten children born to Pedro's father, Alfonso XI of Castile, by his powerful mistress, Leonor de Guzman, whom Pedro had executed as soon as his father succumbed to the Black Death in 1350.

Thus Enrique had good cause to seek vengeance, and of course he was not the only man who had a score to settle with this 'vile evil-doer', as Walsingham called him.

Pedro fled to Corunna, whence he sent a desperate appeal to the Black Prince for aid. The Prince responded, determined not so much to uphold Pedro's legitimate claim to his throne and restore him by force, as to crush the alliance between France and Castile, which placed Aquitaine under threat from both north and south, and England at risk of invasion by the powerful Castilian navy. Edward III readily sanctioned such an enterprise, and John of Gaunt offered military support. The two princes — mindful of the prophecy that the leopards of England would one day flutter over the battlefields of Spain — now prepared to make war on- the usurper, raising armies in Aquitaine and England.

Meanwhile, Pedro and his three daughters by Maria de Padilla —

Beatrice, thirteen, Constance, twelve, and Isabella, ten — had taken refuge at Bordeaux in Aquitaine, where they were accorded every courtesy by the Black Prince, and accommodated in the Abbey of St Andrew. Pedro showed himself exceedingly grateful, and solemnly promised the Prince, on oath, that once he was restored to his throne, he would reimburse him for the entire costs of the venture; he would leave his daughters at Bordeaux as surety for this.

In November 1366, Sir Hugh Swynford received letters of protection commanding him to join the Duke of Lancaster in Guienne. In September, John of Gaunt had arrived at Bayonne in Gascony with a thousand archers and men-at-arms, and in November he travelled through Aquitaine to rendezvous with his brother the Black Prince. Soon afterwards, Hugh must have taken ship from England to Gascony and caught up with the Duke's army.

Both the Duchess Blanche and Katherine Swynford were pregnant when their husbands rode off to war. They would not see their lords again for more than a year. By Christmas 1366, Blanche had established herself at Bolingbroke Castle, four miles west of Spilsby and twenty-six miles east of Lincoln, where the King joined her for the Yuletide festivities. The twelfth-century castle lay in the hilly Lincolnshire wolds, in what is now the village of Old Bolingbroke, and Katherine would almost certainly have visited it at some time as part of the Lancastrian entourage. At seven months pregnant, with her lord overseas and her home not far away, she may well have been in

attendance on the Duchess at Bolingbroke on this occasion. The castle had become part of the Lancastrian patrimony in 1311; it was a strong square fortress, with round towers at each corner, a moat fed by springs, a 'very stately' entrance 'over a fair drawbridge', and an imposing Norman church nearby, the south aisle of which had been built by John of Gaunt in 1363. The Duchess and her retinue would have been accommodated in the comfortable timber-framed domestic range of buildings in the courtyard.

Katherine had moved to Lincoln by the middle of February 1367. It was in a house there that she bore Hugh a son and heir, who arrived on 24 February 1367, the feast of St Matthias the Apostle, and was baptised Thomas after his grandfather and one of his sponsors, Thomas de Sutton, a cathedral canon, who was doubtless a relative of the powerful John de Sutton; the other male sponsor was John de Worksop, also a canon of Lincoln. Hugh's Inquisition Post Mortem of June 1372 states that his son Thomas was then four, so it is often claimed that his birth took place in February 1368, but Hugh probably did not return to England until October 1367, so that is hardly possible. As has been demonstrated, dates of birth recorded in Inquisitions Post Mortem are often inaccurate.

This is manifest in the Inquisition taken to establish Thomas Swynford's age between 22 June 1394 and 22 June 1395. No fewer than twelve witnesses came forward to declare that he had been born in 1373, fifteen months after his father's death and a year after he had been described as four years old in Sir Hugh's Inquisition Post Mortem. All had apparently been present at young Thomas's baptism, which took place on 25 February 1367, the day after his birth, at the Church of St Margaret in the cathedral close. This is the first record of an association between Katherine Swynford and Lincoln Cathedral and its close, with which she was often to be linked in the future, and the choice of two members of the Cathedral Chapter as sponsors suggests that she was already well known to, and highly regarded by, that body.

The eleventh-century church of St Margaret no longer survives, having been pulled down around 1780. It stood on a green in the precinct of the Bishop's Palace, between Pottergate and the cathedral, opposite the house in the close in which Katherine would one day reside. The church was surmounted by a squat Norman tower and had an Early English window at its east end.

The witnesses at the baptism included John Liminour of Lincoln, who

may have been a limner (a painter of miniatures in illuminated manuscripts) for he recalled bringing a missal and another book to the church and selling them there to John de Worksop; John Plaint and John Balden, servants to Thomas de Sutton; Roger Fynden, chamberlain to John de Worksop; John Sumnour, Nicholas Bolton and Richard Colville, all of Lincoln, the last of whom had been charged by Katherine's steward to bring home twenty-four bows for distribution to members of her household, doubtless for archery practice, skilful strategic use of the longbow being one of England's great strengths in the war with France; Henry Taverner, who recalled the occasion well because his first son was baptised on the same day; and Gilbert de Beseby, Katherine's chamberlain. The testimony of these people provides interesting details about a mediaeval baptism: we see Thomas Boterwyk, the parish clerk, reverently conveying the holy oil, or chrism, from the altar to the stone font; John Plaint carrying a flame to light the candle; two men holding basins of water and towels so that the godfathers and godmother (her identity remains unknown) could wash their hands after the ceremony; William Hammond, a servant of John de Sereby of Lincoln (who would sell land to Katherine in 1387), falling and breaking one of the two jars of red wine he was carrying into the church, and being beaten for it by his master; and Katherine's chamberlain bearing cloths of silk and cloth of gold in which to wrap the baby after his christening. Such fabrics were extremely costly, and their appearance at this ceremony perhaps suggests that they had been generously provided by the Duchess Blanche; certainly an impecunious knight such as Hugh Swynford could not have afforded them.

There may be another explanation, though. This information was all provided in 1394-5, about twenty-eight years after Thomas's birth, and the witnesses were to a man inaccurate in one important detail, for it has been demonstrated that Thomas could not have been born in 1373. We should consider, however, that in 1394-5 most of these witnesses were in their fifties, sixties and even seventies - old by mediaeval standards — and some may have been forgetful, or followed the testimony of the rest, or — which may be significant — even confused Thomas's baptism with another that did take place in 1373, in the same church. And that later baptism may have been of John Beaufort, the eldest of Katherine Swynford's children by John of Gaunt, for which rich cloths would undoubtedly have been provided. Certainly, as Cole points out, none of these witnesses intended that their testimony should in any way impugn Thomas Swynford's legitimacy. Their main purpose was to demonstrate that he was now over twenty-one and able to take up his inheritance as his father's

heir. There were plenty of Swynford relatives to challenge his tide, should any question of bastardy have arisen, but there is no evidence that any ever did.

The birth of a Swynford heir must have been a great triumph for Katherine, especially after bearing two or perhaps three daughters; it meant that if the baby survived, Hugh's family name would be carried on and his lands inherited by his son.

Meanwhile, John of Gaunt had joined the Black Prince and his army at Dax on 13 January, having paused briefly in Bordeaux to pay his affectionate respects to his sister-in-law, the Princess Joan, and to greet her new son, Richard, to whom she had given birth there on 6 January, the Feast of the Epiphany.⁸ Richard of Bordeaux was the second son of the Prince and Princess, the elder, Edward of Angouleme, having been born on 27 January 1365; Edward, of course, was the next heir to England after his illustrious father.

In February, in bitter cold and heavy snow, the two armies made the hazardous crossing of the Pyrenees into Castile, where on 3 April 1367, they won a spectacular victory over Enrique of Trastamara at the Battle of Najera, near Burgos, during which John of Gaunt, in command of the vanguard, acquitted himself very courageously; according to Chandos Herald, 'the noble Duke of Lancaster, full of virtue, fought so nobly that everyone marvelled at beholding his great powers and at how, in his high daring, he exposed his person to danger'. Earlier, he had earned stout praise for his alacrity in repelling a surprise attack by the French in the Pyrenees. After Najera, when sixteen thousand men lay dead in the field, the Black Prince wrote to his wife: 'Be assured, dearest companion, that we, our brother of Lancaster, and all the great men of our army are, thank God, in good form.'

Doubtless the Duchess Blanche also would have been relieved to receive this news. On the very same day as the victory, she bore John of Gaunt a healthy son at Bolingbroke, who was named Henry in honour of her illustrious father. The choice of name suggests that his elder brother John was still alive. It is unlikely, given that her own baby was less than two months old, that Katherine Swynford attended the Duchess in her confinement, and she was probably then at Kettlethorpe or still in Lincoln. The house in Lincoln in which she gave birth has not been identified; given that she later occupied two properties in the cathedral close, and that her son was baptised in the church in the close, it was probably in that area, and she was perhaps

staying there as the guest of one of the cathedral canons.

On 2 May, the Black Prince and the Duke of Lancaster entered Burgos, the chief city of Castile, in triumph. Pedro was formally restored to his throne, and the English princes and their troops settled down to wait for payment of the money he had sworn to pay them. They waited in vain, for Pedro repeatedly refused to keep his promise, much to the Black Prince's fury; all that was handed over in reimbursement was a large, uncut ruby.⁸⁷ The delay was ultimately to prove disastrous, for in the burning heat of that summer, there was a fearful outbreak of amoebic dysentery in the English encampment, with the Prince himself being fatefully struck down, and four fifths of his men perishing. By the autumn he was no better, and also suffering from dropsy, while his surviving soldiers were thoroughly demoralised. To add to his troubles, Enrique was busily laying waste to Gascony, so the Prince and John of Gaunt had no choice but to return there. John arrived back in England at the beginning of October, and with him, we may presume, was Hugh Swynford. Both men must have been pleased to be reunited with their wives and delighted to make the acquaintance of the sons that had been born in their absence.

Around 1367-8, Philippa Chaucer also bore a son, another Thomas, whose paternity has been the subject of much debate. In the late sixteenth century, Thomas Speght reported that 'some hold opinion (but I know not upon what grounds) that Thomas Chaucer was not the son of Geoffrey Chaucer, but rather some kinsman of his whom he brought up'. This is unfortunately too vague to constitute convincing evidence of Philippa's infidelity, but in recent years, it has been suggested that she, as well as her sister Katherine, was John of Gaunt's mistress, and that he was the father not only of Thomas Chaucer, but also of Elizabeth Chaucer.

The grounds for this are threefold. First, only the arms of Philippa de Roët feature in the twenty shields that adorn Thomas Chaucer's tomb at Ewelme in Oxfordshire; those of Geoffrey Chaucer are nowhere to be seen, and the Roët arms are quartered with those of Thomas Chaucer's wife, Maud Burghersh.

Second, in 1381, John of Gaunt paid a very handsome dowry to the prestigious Barking Abbey to cover the expenses of admitting Elizabeth Chaucer. As with Blanche Swynford, some writers have concluded that the Duke was making generous provision for the future of his bastard child.⁹ Barking Abbey was a most exclusive house; its abbess was foremost among all the abbesses in the realm, and enjoyed

the status of a baron — but for her sex, she could have sat in the House of Lords. Places in the novitiate at Barking were therefore much sought after for the daughters of noble families, but admittance usually depended on large sums changing hands and a royal recommendation. For the daughter of a mere civil servant, who could hardly have afforded the required dowry, to be accepted was a rare achievement, hence the interest it has attracted among historians.

Third, there is the matter of John of Gaunt's generous gifts to Philippa Chaucer. On three recorded occasions, each at New Year - when gifts were customarily exchanged — in 1380, 1381 and 1382, he presented her with beautiful silver cups.

Advocates of the theory that John of Gaunt was the father of Philippa Chaucer's children would have us believe that he took first one of the Roët sisters, Philippa, as his mistress, presumably around the period 1364-7 or thereabouts, and later the other, Katherine. If so, Philippa would have been very young at the time the liaison began, probably no more than twelve or thirteen, hardly old enough to be of much interest to the twenty-four-year-old Duke. It has also been suggested that she was married off to a complacent Geoffrey Chaucer to give her a veneer of respectability and that Chaucer was willing to play the father to the Duke's bastards; this would explain why his marriage to Philippa was not overtly happy. It would also mean that John was persistently unfaithful to Blanche over a period of perhaps four years, which is at variance with what we know of their marriage, for not a breath of scandal touched it at the time, and there is no evidence of any infidelity on his part. Nor did he ever acknowledge any of Philippa's children as his own, although he did recognise Katherine's bastards and Marie de St Hilaire's daughter. And he was not in the habit of marrying off his mistresses so that he could conceal his paternity of their children.

Most pertinently, any sexual relationship with Philippa Chaucer would have placed John even more firmly within the forbidden degrees of affinity to Katherine Swynford, rendering his relationship with her scandalously incestuous, in an age in which incest was a criminal act for which some offenders were burned at the stake. If such a relationship had existed, it is astonishing that no disapproving chronicler made political capital out of it, or even mentioned it, for there were those who were continually to castigate the Duke for his immorality, and who would have pounced gleefully on any scandal involving him. Furthermore, the only canonical impediment that John asked the Pope to dispense with in 1396 was the compaternity created

by his being godfather to Katherine's child. Again, it is unlikely that he would have imperilled his immortal soul, and Katherine's, by courting automatic excommunication. He also risked nullifying the dispensation he was seeking by not declaring to the Pope such a serious impediment as incest; John, a man of the world, would have known that divine law prohibited him from marrying his mistress's sister. No dispensation had ever been granted in a case like this, so there was no question that such a marriage would have been incestuous and invalid. Hence we must conclude that John was not the father of Philippa Chaucer's children, that he had never had sexual intercourse with her, and that Thomas Chaucer and his sister Elizabeth were Geoffrey's children.

Interestingly, of those twenty shields on Thomas Chaucer's tomb, the only male ones are those of the Beauforts, the sons of John of Gaunt by Katherine Swynford. The other seventeen are those of female relatives from some of the greatest families in the land. We can conclude, therefore, that Thomas Chaucer, and no doubt his daughter Alice (the wife of William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk), who was responsible for the building of his tomb, preferred to stress their royal and noble connections rather than the mercantile ones, and since Thomas's mother had been the sister of the Duchess of Lancaster, it was natural that he should place the Duchess's arms on the tomb, and omit those of his father, who, for all his literary reputation, had no claim to nobility.

The dowering of Elizabeth Chaucer should be seen as an act of generosity on the part of John of Gaunt to his mistress's niece, who was also the daughter of two people who had given excellent service to his family. Such liberality was a mark of the Duke's character. Clearly he thought highly of Philippa Chaucer, who had served his mother so devotedly and would later render the same good service to his wife, and his philanthropic gesture to Philippa's daughter should therefore be viewed with no more suspicion than the Countess Margaret's dowering of Elizabeth de Roët.

With regard to John's gifts to Philippa, these were probably innocent tokens of appreciation of the good service rendered to his mother and his duchess by a lady who was not only the wife of a man he liked and admired, but also the sister of his beloved mistress, whose other relatives also enjoyed his favour. Katherine seems to have been fond of her sister - Philippa was to live in her house in later years - and John's favour to Philippa may have been prompted by her. Other ladies of his wife's household, and members of his own, received

similar gifts from the Duke, so there is nothing particularly special or significant about his gifts to Philippa. And while John of Gaunt was extremely generous to his acknowledged bastards, he was far less munificent to Thomas Chaucer, which would have been strange had Thomas really been his son.

Thus there are no credible grounds to substantiate the theory that John of Gaunt committed the sin of incest: that when he took Katherine Swynford as his mistress, he had already enjoyed a sexual relationship with her sister.

'Mistress of the Duke'

Death stalked Katherine's world in the years 1368—71. Firstly, around 24 July 1368, her older sister, Elizabeth de Roët, died in her convent at Mons. Unless Katherine was in touch with unrecorded relatives in Hainault, she might not for some time have learned of, or been too greatly affected by, the passing of this sister with whom she can barely — if at all — have been acquainted. But the death of Blanche of Lancaster on 12 September 1368 at Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire would have had far more impact, and would surely have brought her much grief and distress, for Blanche had held her in 'great affection', and Katherine in return had given her 'good and agreeable service', for which she would in time to come be handsomely rewarded. It also seems to have brought to an end her service in the Lancastrian household.

It was possibly around August 1368 when Blanche bore her last child, a third daughter, baptised Isabella, who shortly afterwards was 'swiftly summoned out of this world to the seat of the angels'.⁴ Blanche was then twenty-six, and had borne seven children in nine years of marriage. The fact that she died the month after this latest birth suggests that she had suffered complications in labour, or contracted puerperal fever, a major cause of maternal deaths and a common occurrence in an era when the transmission of infection from a midwife's dirty hands, or other unhygienic practices, was not understood. John of Gaunt was with his wife at the end, and that same day he wrote from Tutbury to his 'faithful friend' and neighbour Thomas Appleby, Bishop of Carlisle, bidding him order masses for the salvation of the soul of Blanche, 'who has died'.

'Put a tomb over my heart, for when I remember, I am so melancholy,' mourned Froissart. 'She died young and lovely.' He wrote this the following year, and because of this historians believed until recently that Blanche perished of the plague on 12 September 1369 at Bolingbroke Castle. But the date that is clearly stated on the Duke's letter in Bishop Appleby's register makes it clear that Blanche died in 1368.

John of Gaunt was apparently devastated by the loss of his wife. Their

love had been enduring, and throughout their nine-year marriage there had been no hint of discord or infidelity, while the frequency of Blanche's pregnancies argues a healthy sex life. Blanche's memory was clearly cherished by John, for he was solemnly to observe the anniversary of her death for the rest of his life, and more than thirty years later would direct in his will that he be buried beside her — the wife who brought him his great inheritance, the mother of his heir, and his first love.

We do not know if Katherine was in attendance at Tutbury when Blanche died, but with the rest of the Duchess's household, she would have been issued with black mourning garments and been summoned to accompany the funeral cortege, which was escorted south by a thousand horsemen. Beside the coffin was carried a seated effigy of the deceased in her robes of state, probably made of wood, and apparently looking very lifelike. Katherine perhaps witnessed the unseemly row between the Abbot of St Albans and the Bishop of Lincoln over who should take precedence in St Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire, where the Duchess was to lie in state for a requiem mass, just as she would witness a similar row on another tragic occasion just over twenty years later. She may also have been present when her late mistress's body was interred 'on the north side of the quire',⁹ near the high altar, in St Paul's Cathedral in London.

Old St Paul's, which was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, was the largest building in mediaeval England. It had been completed in 1220, on the site of an earlier church founded around 607 by King Ethelbert of Kent, which was burned down in 1087. The new stone cathedral in the Romanesque style was truly awe-inspiring: 'the height of the steeple was 520 foot, and the spire was 260 foot. The length of the whole church is 720 foot. The breadth thereof is 130 foot, and the height of the body of that church is 150 foot.' Thus the building was longer than the present St Paul's Cathedral, and its spire higher than that of Salisbury Cathedral, the highest in England today.

Blanche's was the first royal burial in St Paul's since that of the Saxon King Ethelred II in 1016; in Katherine's day, his massive stone sarcophagus could still be seen in the north quire aisle. The cathedral also housed the magnificent shrine of St Erkenwald, a seventh-century Bishop of London, which stood behind the high altar.

When a royal lady died, her household was usually disbanded, for it was not considered fitting for her female attendants to remain in a widower's establishment. Yet there was a pressing need for someone

to take care of the three young children left motherless by Blanche's death, and it has been suggested by several writers that Katherine, who was clearly good with children and highly regarded in the Lancastrian household, stayed on in the nursery. If so, she cannot have been there in any exalted capacity, for it is clear that other ladies were looking after the ducal offspring. In 1369, the Duke appointed his and Blanche's cousin, Alice FitzAlan, Lady Wake to look after Henry, Philippa and Elizabeth; Lady Wake, who was paid [£66.13s.4d](#)

(£18,795) in 1369 just for looking after Henry and his household, was still in charge of them, and acting as their governess, in November 1371. Furthermore, in 1370, John of Gaunt rewarded Alyne, the wife of his squire, Edward Gerberge, with a handsome pension of ,£100 (24,779) Per annum for 'the painful diligence and good service she has rendered to our very dear daughter Philippa during the death of our beloved companion'. We can infer from this that eight-year-old Philippa was perhaps with Blanche at the end, that her mother's death affected her very badly, and that Alyne Gerberge played a far more important role in comforting her than Katherine Swynford did, which suggests that Katherine was not at Tutbury when Blanche died. The size of the annuity paid to Alyne is commensurate with her having been appointed to look after Philippa after Blanche's death. Clearly she was a trusted servant, for 'our well-loved *damoiselle*' Alyne was later appointed by John of Gaunt to serve his second Duchess.

We do know, however, that Katherine's daughter Blanche remained in the ducal household as a *damoiselle* to Philippa and Elizabeth of Lancaster until at least September 1369 which seems appropriate in regard to a girl who was the probable godchild of the Duke and Duchess. But as none of John of Gaunt's registers survives for the period 1369-72, we have no way of knowing how long Blanche Swynford remained with the ducal princesses after 1369.

It might be more realistic to suppose that, rather than remaining with the Duke's children, Katherine, who had a growing family of her own, returned to Kettlethorpe to bring them up and attend to her duties as chatelaine and custodian. Her long-term reputation as the Lady of Kettlethorpe would surely not have been so well established had she spent long periods absent from the manor.

Geoffrey Chaucer had been sent to France and Italy on diplomatic business on 17 July 1368, so was not in England when the Duchess died. On his return, before 31 October, he evidently found John of Gaunt paralysed by grief, which spurred him to write his celebrated

elegiac memorial for Blanche, *The Boke of the Duchesse*, as much to comfort her widower and bring him to an acceptance of her death as to commemorate her beauty and virtue — and perhaps to console himself.

In this, his first major poem, Chaucer conjures up a dream sequence of an allegorical royal 'hunting of the hart' — the pun was intentional — in which he, the narrator, becomes separated from the hunting party and wanders into a forest, where he spies a tragic sight:

I suddenly saw a man in black

Reclining, seated with his back

Against an oak, a giant tree.

'Oh Lord,' I thought, 'who can that be?'

It was - and Chaucer's readers would have recognised him at once — the grieving Duke of Lancaster; we have already seen how, scattered through the poem, are punning allusions to 'John', 'Lancaster', 'Richmond' and 'Lady White' (for Blanche). Chaucer borrowed his theme from Guillaume de Machaut, but his subject was poignantly close to home.

The young knight, who 'was wholly clad in black' and displayed 'a complexion green and pale', was hanging his head and sighing, 'and with a deathly mourning cried a rhyme of verse in lamentation to himself, more pitiful and charged with woe than I had ever heard. It seemed remarkable that Nature could suffer any living creature to bear such grief and not be dead.' Seeing him 'in state so grim', the narrator greets him, which prompts an outpouring of woe. The knight wonders why 'his misery had not made him die'; his sorrows were so manifold and sharp, he says, they 'lay upon his heart ice-cold ... He'd almost lost his sanity.' Then, realising he is talking to a total stranger, he pulls himself together and greets him courteously.

Encouraged by the curious narrator, and thanking his 'gentle friend' for his 'kind intent', the knight opens his heart. Speaking kindly and frankly, 'without false style or sense of rank', and seeming approachable, wise and reasonable, he says he wishes he had not been born, that he weeps when he is alone, and that his days and nights are detestable, 'for I am sorrow, and sorrow is I'.

'My bliss is gone, my joy is lost for evermore,' he cries, 'and there exists no happiness.' Without revealing what tragedy has overtaken him, he tells the stranger how he had won the love of his lady, despite being rebuffed several times. He says he had fallen in love at a tender age, and that that love is with him still. He describes, in minute detail, his lady's beauty and virtues. 'I seem to see her evermore,' he declares. 'She was my hap, my heal and all my bliss ... While I live, I'll evermore remember her.' Eventually, the narrator asks, 'Where is she now?' 'She is dead!' comes the bitter reply.

There is no more to be said; 'all was done', and the hunters can be heard approaching. A bell strikes, and the narrator awakens to find it was all a dream. But the outpouring of memories of the cherished one who had gone and the love she shared with the man in black would have been cathartic in itself for John of Gaunt, and hopefully helped him come to terms with his grief, which was surely Chaucer's intention.

The voice in which Chaucer narrates the poem is unusually emotional; clearly the death of the young Duchess had hit him hard too, occasioning genuine sympathy for the bereft widower. The social gulf between the griever, the King's son, and the comforter, the King's esquire, is apparent in the formal, deferential and tentative manner in which the narrator approaches the man in black, but their easy discourse suggests an established rapport between two men who already knew, liked and respected each other. Some commentators have claimed that *The Boke of the Duchesse* is purely a poem in the French poetic tradition, and does not bear much relation to real events, but that is perhaps too narrow a view, for why should Chaucer have used all those allusions and puns to make it very clear to his readers that 'the man in black' was in fact the grief-stricken Duke of Lancaster?⁶ Furthermore, in the prologue to a later work of Chaucer's, *The Legend of Good Women*, reference is made to his having written a poem originally entitled *The Death of Blanche the Duchess*. What could be clearer than that?

There may have been another reason for the emotional tone of the poem. In it, Chaucer intriguingly - and very obliquely - reveals that for eight years he has suffered a secret and unrequited desire for an unnamed lady. Only she can cure him of his 'malady', but 'that hope is gone'. Therefore he knows, from personal experience, what loss is. 'It must be endured,' he says.

Historians have endlessly speculated who this lady was, some even

claiming it was Blanche herself, which was certainly possible in those days when the conventions of courtly love permitted esquires to conceive passions for high-born ladies far above them and beyond their reach; and the reference to his hope being gone might refer to the death of his revered lady. If so, Chaucer had first fallen for her charms around 1360, soon after her marriage to John of Gaunt. Such a theory would account for Chaucer's obscure wording of this passage, since he could never have dared publicly to confess such a love. And it would explain the emotional tone and empathy of the poem. Never again would Chaucer refer to himself in the guise of a lover.

Grief-stricken he might be, but political advantage dictated that John of Gaunt could not be allowed to remain a widower for long. He was too great a prize in the matrimonial market, and Blanche had not been in her grave two months before Edward III and Queen Philippa opened negotiations for a second marriage for their son. In November, John was proposed as a husband for Margaret, heiress to Louis III, Count of Flanders, a match that would have brought him a principality and provided England with a buffer state against the hostility of France. It was an irresistible prospect, and one on which John, however tragic his grief, could not have turned his back. But the Count rejected the offer, preferring to court the French, and in 1369 Margaret was married to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, brother of the French King Charles V.

It has been credibly suggested that Chaucer probably wrote the 1,334 lines of *The Boke of the Duchesse* before these negotiations were opened, rapidly polishing off his masterpiece in the short weeks between his return from France and an approach being made to Flanders.' The intense immediacy and poignancy of the poem, and its consolatory aspects, suggest that it was indeed composed in the desolate aftermath of Blanche's death. John Stow claims - perhaps basing his information on sources that are now lost to us — that it was written at John of Gaunt's request, which is possible; however, there is no contemporary evidence for this, or any record of the poem being dedicated or presented to the Duke. Claims that it was written for recital at one of the annual memorial services for Blanche may be a little far-fetched, considering its length and the fact that no one ever remarked upon this unusual addition to the ceremonies.

We may, however, be almost certain that the poem was intended for private circulation within the Lancastrian household and even in the court itself, for three copies have survived, which suggests there were more made; furthermore, the reference to the poem in the prologue to

The Legend of Good Women indicates that it had attained some fame. It would certainly have been known to the members of Chaucer's own family, and it was possibly thanks to Chaucer's kinship to Katherine Swynford, as much as to his links to the court, that he learned of the magnitude of John's grief. Who else but Katherine would have been so well placed to tell him about it? Unless, of course, it was the Duke himself and the poem is based on a real-life conversation that Chaucer set within a dream sequence to comply with contemporary literary conventions. Chaucer, as Pearsall points out, was a mere esquire at this time; he would surely not have presumed to write this intimate poem dealing with such private matters without some indication that it would be well received by the mighty Duke of Lancaster. The interaction between the two characters in the poem suggests that, whether the Duke commissioned it or not, there was a rapport between him and Chaucer, and an element of patronage involved on his part. Yet whatever the circumstances in which the poem was composed, it does convincingly convey the deep and anguished grief that John of Gaunt undoubtedly suffered for Blanche of Lancaster.

In 1369, there was a third outbreak of the Black Death. It began in March, the same month that Pedro the Cruel, King of Castile, was ambushed and murdered by Enrique of Trastamara at Montiel. Instead of being decently chested and buried, the body was decapitated and left unburied, which outraged Castilian sensibilities; it was several days before the head was sent to Seville for public exhibition and the body interred. Immediately afterwards, Enrique II usurped the throne, ignoring the legitimate rights of Pedro's two surviving daughters — Beatrice had taken the veil and died in 1368. Constance, the eldest, now succeeded her father as *de jure* Queen of Castile, but she and her sister Isabella were still in exile at Bayonne in Gascony as hostages of the Black Prince, and there seemed little prospect of her ever enforcing her claim to the Castilian throne and the crown Pedro had bequeathed to her.

Only a week after Pedro's murder, Charles V of France, having rejected the Treaty of Bretigny, declared war on England. Late in May, the French clawed back all the land held by the English in Ponthieu, and began amassing a great invasion force. In retaliation, in Parliament, an incensed Edward III again assumed the tide King of France. This fresh outbreak of hostilities was to impact hugely on the lives of Katherine, Hugh and John of Gaunt. On 12 June - at a time when the plague had hit London and the court had taken refuge at Windsor — the Duke was appointed King's Captain and Lieutenant in Calais, Guisnes and the surrounding country. This was his first

independent command, and on 26 July, he arrived in Calais with an army in which Geoffrey Chaucer and probably Hugh Swynford were serving, and spent August and September campaigning in France.

When John sailed from England, he left his mother, Queen Philippa, 'dangerously sick' with what was described as a dropsy; she seems to have been seriously ill for some time before then, since her tomb effigy had been ordered prior to January 1368. Among those in attendance on her at Windsor was Philippa Chaucer. On 10 March 1369, along with fifteen other *damoiselles*, Philippa had received furs and cloth for a new gown, but there was little chance to appear in public richly clad, for by July the Queen was bedridden and needing the constant ministrations of her women. She died on 14 August, 'to the infinite misfortune of King Edward, his children and the whole kingdom'. 'I wring my hands, I clap my palms!' wrote an anguished Froissart, recalling also the death of Blanche of Lancaster a year earlier. 'I have lost too many in these two ladies.'

On 1 September, Edward III commanded Henry de Snaith, guardian of 'our Great Wardrobe', to provide mourning garments for his family and the late Queen's servants. Among these were twelve ells of black cloth and some furs for little Blanche Swynford, who is described as a *damoiselle* of the daughters of the Duke of Lancaster; she received the same cloth and furs as were allocated to her young mistresses and other high-ranking ladies, which suggests that Queen Philippa had retained an affection for the family of Katherine de Roët, her young compatriot, whom she had brought up and seen well placed and honourably married, and that the King too was fond of Katherine, for Philippa Chaucer, who had been in the Queen's service for some years, received only six ells of cloth, while Chaucer got just three.²⁵ As for Katherine, still perhaps sorrowing over the death of the Duchess Blanche, the loss of her kindly and inspirational guardian, who had acted as a mother to her, must have left her feeling bereft.

The news of the Queen's death hit John of Gaunt hard too, for he loved and honoured both his parents, and would still have been grieving for his late wife. Froissart tells us that 'information of this heavy loss was carried to the English army at Tournehem, which greatly afflicted everyone, more especially her son, John of Gaunt'. Until his death, John cherished 'a gold brooch in the old fashion, with the name of God inscribed on each part of it, which my most honourable lady mother, whom God preserve, gave to me, commanding me to guard it with her blessing'.

On 12 September, the first obit (a service marking the anniversary of a death) for the Duchess Blanche was solemnly observed at St Paul's, in the Duke's absence. Her anniversary would be celebrated every year for the rest of John's lifetime and beyond, further evidence of his love for her and his grief at her loss. Whenever he was unable to attend, the great officers of his household stood proxy for him. By September 1371, a chantry chapel had been established above Blanche's burial place in St Paul's, and soon afterwards an altar was built and two salaried chaplains appointed to celebrate daily masses for the repose of her soul.

In October, thanks to dwindling supplies, plague and the arrival of wintry weather, John of Gaunt was forced to abandon his French offensive. By the end of November, he was back at the Savoy, and Sir Hugh Swynford was probably riding north to Lincolnshire to attend to his estates and be reunited with his family.

John of Gaunt kept the Christmas of 1369 at Langley in Hertfordshire with his father the King; it must have been a sad time for the bereft royal family, with the late Queen still unburied. Philippa of Hainault's magnificent state funeral took place on 29 January 1370, six months after her death - such things took time to arrange. Philippa and Geoffrey Chaucer would certainly have been there, and it may not be too fanciful to wonder if Katherine Swynford herself was among the mourners, for she had been brought up by the Queen, and was her countrywoman. After being drawn in procession through streets that had been specially cleared of mud and filth, Philippa's body was interred near the shrine of St Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, in earth brought to England from the Holy Land; a fine tomb was later built to her memory, with her lifelike effigy by a Netherlandish sculptor, Hennequin of Liege, resting upon it.

After the obsequies were completed, Katherine perhaps returned to Kettlethorpe. As Chaucer remained in service at court, her sister may have gone to live in his family house in London, with their growing family, for there was no place for her in the royal household now that the Queen was dead.

The political events of 1370 were to have a profound effect on Katherine's future, so it is worth leaving her at Kettlethorpe for the time being, and looking at what was happening in the wider world.

After Queen Philippa's death, things went badly for the ageing Edward III. In 1370, Aquitaine came under threat from Charles V, who had

allied himself with Enrique II of Castile. The harsh rule of the Black Prince had driven his Gascon subjects to appeal to the French King for aid, and as the Prince's overlord, Charles V had summoned him to Paris to account for his cruelties, but he was too ill to comply. In retaliation, the French closed in on the Duchy.

Again John of Gaunt raised an army, this time to assist his brother in repelling the invader, and once more Sir Hugh Swynford was summoned to attend his lord. Did Katherine have a presentiment, as she saw him off on his way to join the Duke at Plymouth, that she would never see her husband again? She had perhaps often entertained fears of this kind, for war was a dangerous business, and those who escaped death at the hands of the enemy often perished as a result of the dysentery and disease that could decimate armies.

John of Gaunt's fleet sailed at the end of June, and once again, Geoffrey Chaucer was with it, in company with his brother-in-law, Hugh Swynford.

John would have been shocked at the change in his once-magnificent brother, who was waiting for him at Cognac. The Black Prince was virtually bedridden, suffering from what Froissart calls 'an incurable illness', the malady that had laid him low for three years now, since he had contracted amoebic dysentery in Castile. He could no longer ride a horse, and it was reported to Charles V that he had a dropsy from which he could never recover. Modern medical opinion holds that this was symptomatic of nephritis, an inflammation of the kidneys that causes swollen legs, ankles, eyes and genitals, due to a build-up of fluid. The Prince's condition, and the humiliation and frustration engendered by weakness and helplessness, had turned him into an embittered man.

On 24 August, the city of Limoges voluntarily - and treasonably — surrendered to the French. The Black Prince's fury was lethal, his retribution savage. He laid siege to the city, and when the walls were breached on 18 September, ordered it to be sacked, directing that neither man, woman nor child be spared. The carnage went on relentlessly for two days, as the invalid Prince watched from a horse-litter, urging his men to ever-worse atrocities. Soon the ruined streets were piled high with hundreds of corpses and running with blood. Never again would Edward of Woodstock's glorious reputation shine as fair.

John of Gaunt was present at the fall of Limoges, in command of the

English forces during the siege, and it was as a result of his brave efforts that the city capitulated. Froissart implies that John supported his brother in inflicting the atrocities that were committed after the siege: 'I do not understand how *they* [author's italics] could have failed to take pity on people who were too unimportant to have committed treason,' he opined, 'yet they paid for it, and paid more dearly than the leaders who had committed it.' But Froissart may not be correct — he certainly exaggerated by tenfold the number slaughtered — for afterwards, it was thanks to John's intervention that the bishop who had surrendered Limoges to the French was able to escape the Black Prince's vengeance.

After Limoges, the Prince realised he no longer had the strength to govern his principality, and reluctantly decided to relinquish his command to his brother. On 8 October, referring to 'the very great affection and. love' he cherished for John, he created him Lord of Bergerac and Roche-sur-Yon,³ and three days later, surrendered to him the lieutenancy of Aquitaine. His burden laid down, he retired to Bordeaux.

In January 1371, the Prince's physicians urged him to return to his native air of England without delay, if he wished to preserve his life. His misery was compounded, that same month, by the death of his five-year-old heir, Edward of Angouleme, at Bordeaux. Yet so ill was the Prince that the bereaved parents dared not let even their terrible grief delay their departure. Leaving John of Gaunt to arrange their child's burial, the Prince and Princess returned to England with their surviving son Richard at the end of January. When they made land in Devon, they were obliged to rest for five weeks before the Prince could face the journey to Berkhamsted Castle, and when they arrived there, he took to his bed. From that time, he was a broken man.

For the next six months, John of Gaunt ruled Aquitaine, holding it successfully against the French. Then, in July, in accordance with the terms of his office, he relinquished his command and handed over his authority to Jean de Grailly, Captal de Buch. The Duke now had his sights on a richer prize than Aquitaine. The daughters of Pedro the Cruel, Queen Constance and her sister Isabella, had remained in exile under the protection of first the Black Prince and then John of Gaunt, consigned to a humble existence in a village near Bayonne. Their position was an invidious one, for although royal, they were outcasts from their homeland, dependent on the charity of the English, whom their father had betrayed, and surrounded only by a few of their own people. 'The girls had suffered considerably, on account of which they

were the objects of great pity.' Now all that was to change.

On 10 August, John of Gaunt took up residence at Bordeaux, the capital of the Duchy. English princes sojourning in Bordeaux resided in the ancient Ombriere Palace, in which the royal apartments were located beyond the Porte Cailhau in a tall keep known as 'the Crossbowman', which was surrounded by courtyards with tiled fountains and beautiful semi-tropical gardens. Once settled in this beautiful place, John gave some thought as to what should become of Constance and Isabella, with whom he must have had a passing acquaintance over the years. He was well aware that Constance had been willed the throne of Castile by her father, King Pedro, and was regarded as its legitimate queen by his followers. All she lacked was someone to take up her cause, and John knew that for the man who could successfully do so, there would be rich prizes indeed.

Some time during that sun-drenched summer of 1371, Guichard d'Angle, Marshal of Aquitaine and a trusted friend, diplomat and member of the Duke's council, who had been held prisoner by Enrique of Trastamara for two years, made the suggestion that John of Gaunt himself marry Constance and claim the crown of Castile in her right, a suggestion he would surely not have made without knowing that the idea was already in John's mind, and perhaps in Edward III's too. The Gascon barons backed the proposal. Such a union made good political sense: not only would it bring John a throne and a kingdom, which he had perhaps long desired, but it would also break the alliance between Castile and France, an alliance that was posing a very real threat to England and her chances of winning the war. The proposal 'pleased [the Duke] so well that he sent without delay four of his knights for the young ladies'.³⁷

For Constance, regaining her throne and laying King Pedro's bones properly to rest in his native earth appear to have been sacred duties, for she cherished the memory of her father. Her strong loyalty is perhaps reflected in Chaucer's generous portrayal of Pedro in 'The Monk's Tale', and we may suppose that the poet was used to hearing all about the murdered king's virtues and death from his wife Philippa, who in turn must have heard it again and again from Constance, whom she was to serve for years. Thus, ignoring the more brutal realities of Pedro's rule and character, Chaucer could write:

O noble, O worthy Pedro, glory of Spain, Whom Fortune held so high
in majesty, Well ought men thy piteous death complain!

Mindful that her father had long desired his daughters to be married to sons of Edward III, Constance accepted the Duke of Lancaster's proposal with alacrity, confident that such a great prince would be successful in helping her achieve her cherished aims. Realistically, though, that was a remote prospect, for with the backing of France, Enrique of Trastamara had become even more entrenched in Castile.

Constance was in every way an ideal choice of royal bride: she was young, beautiful and devout, and she brought to the marriage the promise of a kingdom. Her tragic plight appealed to John's sense of chivalry: Guichard d'Angle had played on that when he pointed out that marrying her 'would offer comfort and aid to these girls, daughters of a King, who are forced by circumstances to live in their present state'. It was these words that had 'softened the heart of the Duke'. Yet Constance was no stereotypical maiden in distress: for all her youth — she was seventeen — she had her father's pride, his singularity of purpose and tenacity, and the passionate, grieving love that only an exile can feel for his or her native land.

We have only two surviving manuscript pictures of Constance: one is in a late-fifteenth-century manuscript in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, and shows her with John of Gaunt at the surrender of Compostela in 1386. The other appears in a genealogy executed between 1493 and 1519 showing the descent of the royal House of Portugal, which includes members of the family of John of Gaunt: Constance wears a red velvet gown with a full skirt and blue kirtle typical of Castilian dress of that later period, and an anachronistic horned headdress. Her hair is black, parted and looped either side of the face in the style that would be favoured by Queen Isabella of Castile, and her features are florid, with a long nose. This illustration may have been based on one in an older manuscript that has been lost, for the headdress is partly of the fourteenth century.

Constance and John were married on 21 September 1371 at Roquefort-sur-Soulzon, a small town nestling on terraces on the side of a rocky outcrop near Mont-de-Marsan in the Aveyron, just south of Bordeaux; since the first century BC, the distinctive Roquefort cheese had been produced there and matured in the local caves. John's wedding gift to Constance was a gold cup 'fashioned in the manner of a double rose with a pedestal and lid, with a white dove on the lid', while Constance gave him the finest gold cup he ever possessed.⁴³ It would be no exaggeration to say that from the day of their marriage, the conquest of Castile would be the major preoccupation of John's life.

On 25 September, after some brief celebrations in Bordeaux, the Duke and his new Duchess arrived at the port of La Rochelle, and there requisitioned a salt ship bound for England, obliging the master to offload his cargo to make room for their retinue and chattels.⁴⁵ John was attended by a train of Castilian knights wearing the Lancastrian livery, and Constance by a bevy of Castilian ladies. They docked at Fowey, near Plymouth, on 4 November, and rested at Plympton Priory from 10 to 14 November. Two days later, the Duke and Duchess had moved on to Exeter, where they offered 20s. £335) in the cathedral. John then left Constance and rode to London to make ready for her arrival; he was in residence at the Savoy, and reunited with his three children, by the end of the month, when he went 'to report to the King'. Then in December, after paying his respects at Blanche's tomb in St Paul's, he travelled down to Kingston Lacy in Dorset, where he and his bride kept Christmas, feasting on venison and rabbits.

John was back at the Savoy by 22 January, having arranged for Constance to journey up to London at her leisure. Her long sojourn in the West Country had perhaps been necessitated by her suffering the discomforts and sickness of early pregnancy.

Hugh Swynford had not accompanied his lord back to England. He died 'beyond seas' in Aquitaine on the Thursday after St Martin', 13 November 1371. The fact that he did not follow the Duke north in September argues that he was already too ill to do so. The news of his death would have taken some weeks to reach Katherine, but probably arrived in time for her to spend a dismal Christmas facing up to early widowhood and the prospect of bringing up her children alone on a pittance, for Hugh's finances and affairs had been left in little better shape than they had been when she married him.

The mediaeval church at Kettlethorpe has long since largely disappeared, and with it any fourteenth-century tombs and memorials, so there is no way of knowing whether Hugh's body was brought back to England and interred there, but given his parlous financial state, he may well have been buried in Aquitaine.⁵² Whether he was laid to rest in Kettlethorpe Church or not, a requiem mass would surely have been held there for him, with Katherine in attendance.

Katherine was only about twenty-one when she was widowed, yet custom required her to put on nun-like mourning garments consisting of a black gown and cloak and a white wimple; the constricting barbe that covered the chin and spread like a cape across the shoulders mercifully had not yet come into fashion. She would wear these weeds

until the expiration of her first year of widowhood, after which she might remarry with propriety.

It would appear that John of Gaunt came to her rescue, and that, learning of her plight, and doubtless recalling her good service to Blanche, he invited her to serve his second Duchess in a similar capacity. Philippa Chaucer, likewise redundant because of the death of a royal mistress, was also appointed to serve Constance as one of her many married *damoiselles*; on 30 August 1372, at Sandwich, John of Gaunt awarded her an annuity of £10 (£3,347) 'by our especial grace for the good and agreeable service that our well-beloved *damoiselle* Philippa Chaucer has done, and will do in the future, for our very dear and well-loved companion the Queen'.

There is no record of Katherine being in Constance's household until March 1373, but given the fact that the King and John of Gaunt were helping her financially in the spring of 1372, and her being in attendance when Constance bore a child probably in the summer of that year, it is likely that she was engaged with her sister when the Duchess's establishment was set up between January and April. Katherine's former experience as a long-term, much-loved member of the Duchess Blanche's household would have left her uniquely qualified to serve the young Constance, and the fact that she was chosen to convey news of the birth of Constance's child to the King suggests that her position was of some prominence.

Philippa Chaucer's appointment to the Lancastrian menage while her husband remained in royal service, and the fact that she was now to be often resident at Hertford Castle or Tutbury Castle, and would remain with the Duchess for some years to come, meant that henceforth she and Geoffrey would see much less of each other. This may be a further indication that their marriage was unhappy and also that Philippa had done with child-bearing. Having spent most of her life at court, she probably preferred the social cachet conferred on her by her return to royal service to living in obscurity as the wife of a royal esquire; she had perhaps not liked living in London, where foreigners were regarded with suspicion and even hostility. Chaucer himself may have welcomed this new arrangement with amicable resignation, seeing his wife when their duties permitted and agreeing to pool their financial resources; from 1374, he went in person to collect Philippa's pension from the Exchequer."

On 30 January, Edward III's council formally recognised John of Gaunt as King of Castile and Leon; from henceforth, John would be

known as 'Monseigneur d'Espagne' rather than 'Monseigneur de Lancaster'; he would sign his letters in regal Castilian style as *Nos el Roy* ('We, the King') and his seal would bear the royal arms of Castile and Leon impaling those of England. John would now be deferred to as if he were a reigning sovereign, and the etiquette observed at his court would have reflected this.

John's zeal for winning a foreign kingdom for himself was to cost him much trust and popularity in England, where people suspected him of disloyalty to the Crown and speculated that his ambitions might not be satisfied with the throne of Castile. Unlike him, many lacked the foresight to see that with an English king reigning in a friendly Castile, France would lose a valuable ally, Castilian naval raids would cease, and England's chances of achieving some success in the war would be vastly improved. Furthermore, for many years to come, John was to subordinate his dynastic ambitions in order to give priority to prosecuting the war with France on England's behalf, and not only because there was no money to pay for an offensive against Castile. Only time would prove that his loyalty to the English Crown was never in doubt, but to many of the xenophobic and increasingly nationalistic commons, to whom all foreigners were 'strangers' and therefore suspect, he was at best pursuing personal aggrandisement, and at worst a traitor.

This would not have mattered so much had not John become the chief influence over the King. Because of Edward III's escalating physical and mental decline, the Black Prince's infirmity and the death of Lionel of Antwerp in 1368, John was now the most important and powerful man in the realm. It was to him that men looked for political leadership, at a time when England's great victories against the French were long past and the war was going disastrously. There were frequent enemy raids on the south coast and consequently disruptions to trade, while a population ravaged by plague was increasingly burdened with the crippling taxes that were needed to pay for the war. At the same time, Edward III's once-brilliant court was degenerating into corruption. It would not be long before both lords and commons looked about them for a scapegoat and pointed a finger at John of Gaunt. Hence he would become widely hated throughout the kingdom, and that would ultimately have repercussions for Katherine herself.

John's unpopularity was unfairly linked in the public mind to that of the King's mistress, Alice Perrers, the married daughter of a Hertfordshire knight, who was now queening it over the court.

Edward had first taken her to his bed perhaps as early as 1364, when she was one of Queen Philippa's *damoiselles* and soon, despite her not being beautiful and lacking a good figure, 'Alice had been preferred in the King's love before the Queen'. Since Philippa's death, Alice had gained ascendancy over her royal lover, who was now descending into a child-like dotage and was rarely seen in public; claims that his decline resulted from the gonorrhoea with which she had infected him have never been substantiated. She bore her royal lover a son and two daughters, and over the years wheedled out of him jewellery worth at least £375 (£105,723), an annuity of £100 (£28,193), twenty-two manors, land in seventeen counties and a London townhouse. It is not surprising therefore that she has been seen as the model for the acquisitive and corrupt Lady Meed in William Langland's poem, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*:

I ... was ware of a woman, wonderfully clad,
Her robe fur-edged, the finest on Earth,
Crowned with a crown, the King hath no better,
Fairly her fingers were fretted with rings,
And in the rings red rubies, as red as a furnace,
And diamonds of dearest price, and double sapphires,
Sapphires and beryls, poison to destroy.
Her rich robe of scarlet dye,
Her ribbons set with gold, red gold, rare stones;
Her array ravished me: such riches saw I never.

By 1372, Alice's reputation was notorious; she was shameless, rapacious and ruthless, and exploited to the full her dominance over the senile King. She persuaded him to let her wear the queen consort's jewels, presided with him over a tournament in Smithfield, decked out as the 'Lady of the Sun', controlled the flow of royal patronage to the benefit of her favourites, and caused outrage by overseeing the proceedings at the Court of King's Bench in Westminster Hall from the sovereign's marble throne, intervening to secure favourable

judgements for her friends. 'This Lady Alice de Perrers had such power and eminence that no one dared prosecute a claim against her.' The public were scandalised, and some accused Alice of using witchcraft to achieve her aims, as they were one day to accuse Katherine Swynford. 'It is not fitting or safe that all the keys should hang from the belt of one woman,' fulminated Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester, while Thomas Walsingham castigated Alice as 'a shameless doxy', 'an infamous whore' and 'a thoroughly bad influence'. Alice's career illustrates just how influential — and ruinous to a prince's reputation — a royal mistress could be, a salutary lesson from which Katherine Swynford's conduct when she herself came to be a royal mistress suggests she had learned much.

Before Alice Perrers, the mistresses of English kings had made only fleeting appearances in history. Their names are more often than not the stuff of legend or passing references in official documents, and none was particularly influential. Even fair Rosamund de Clifford, for whom Henry II planned to divorce Eleanor of Aquitaine in the twelfth century, played a passive role. Prior to the fourteenth century, such women lived obscure lives, enjoying brief liaisons with monarchs, bearing royal bastards and occasionally meriting a mention in a chronicle.

But Alice Perrers broke the mould. With Edward III's blessing and the backing of her allies, William, Lord Latimer, John, Lord Neville of Raby and the powerful London financier, Richard Lyons, she controlled not only access to the King, but also the flow of royal patronage, and thus secured for herself a position of the greatest influence. John of Gaunt may not have liked her, but along with many other eminent figures of the day, including the Pope himself, he respected her abilities and tolerated her for his father's sake - indeed, he was later to protest that he was powerless in the face of her hold over the King — and in May 1373 we find her serving the Duchess Constance alongside Philippa Chaucer at the Savoy, and receiving gifts from the Duke.⁸

On 10 February 1372, Constance made her state entry into London and was formally welcomed as Queen of Castile by the Black Prince, who had risen from his sickbed and struggled onto a horse for the occasion.

He was accompanied by 'several lords and knights, the Mayor of London and a great number of the commons, well-dressed and nobly mounted', who conducted the new Duchess 'through London in a great

and solemn procession. In Cheapside were assembled many gentlemen with their wives and daughters to look at the beauty of the young lady' This statement suggests that Constance's physical charms were already renowned.⁵⁹ 'The procession passed in good order along to the Savoy', where John of Gaunt was waiting to greet his wife. The Black Prince's welcome gift to his sister-in-law was a golden brooch or pendant depicting St George, adorned with sapphires, diamonds and pearls, while the King presented her with a golden crown set with diamonds and pearls.

Soon afterwards, Constance took up residence at Hertford Castle, where her three Lancastrian stepchildren were sent to join her; in 1372, they shared a common chamber, or household, for which their father allocated 300 marks (£33,471) annually to cover their expenditure. Henceforth, they would be attended and attired as befitted the children of a king. The appointment of Alyne Gerberge as a *damoiselle* to Constance suggests that she was still looking after Philippa of Lancaster. By now, Katherine Swynford and Philippa Chaucer were probably also part of the Duchess's household, and both are likely to have had their children with them. Once again, Katherine's duties probably involved helping to care for the ducal children, who must have known her well, and had perhaps welcomed her back warmly.

In March and April 1372, John of Gaunt made a generous settlement on his wife, assigning her 1,000 marks (£11,569) per annum for the expenses of her wardrobe and chamber. He also presented her with costly gifts: rich furs, lengths of cloth of gold, nearly four thousand loose pearls (probably for embellishing her gowns and making buttons), a small circlet of gold encrusted with emeralds and balas rubies, a golden filet set with four balas rubies, and twenty-one pearls set in gold rubies. All were delivered by the Clerk of the Wardrobe to Alyne Gerberge.

This was no more than any royal duke would be expected to do for his bride. But John's generosity might have been prompted by his conscience, for despite his recent marriage, he had taken a mistress: on 1 May 1372, at the Savoy, he gave Katherine Swynford the handsome sum of £10 (£3,347), his first recorded gift to her. This and other evidence strongly suggests that the love affair that was to change the course of English history had begun.

We do not know for certain when John and Katherine became lovers,

but their affair had certainly begun by the late spring of 1372. In determining the date of the birth of John Beaufort, the first of the children born to them, we may also discover the likeliest date for the commencement of their relationship. According to the grant of an annuity made to him by Richard II on 7 June 1392, John Beaufort was then in his twenty-first year; thus he was supposedly born between June 1371 and June 1372. But the dates are problematical. John of Gaunt went to Aquitaine in late June 1370, and did not return until November 1371. To have been born within the stated period, John Beaufort would have to have been conceived between September 1370 and September 1371; however, his father was abroad for the whole of that period, and in September 1371 he married Constance of Castile.

It could be conjectured that Katherine had joined Hugh Swynford overseas, once it was known that he expected to be in Aquitaine for some time, and that the attraction between her and John of Gaunt flourished in the south of France. But that is an unlikely scenario. The wives of soldiers rarely accompanied them abroad; only laundresses and prostitutes followed armies, and any other woman who did so was putting her reputation at risk. And Katherine was the wife of a landed knight, however poor; her task during his absence was to oversee his estates in England and rear their young family.

Even if Katherine had been in Aquitaine with Hugh, there is virtually watertight evidence that her affair with John did not begin until after she was widowed. In John and Katherine's petition to the Pope of 1 September 1396, they asserted that some time after John had stood godfather to Katherine's daughter, 'the same Duke John adulterously knew the same Katherine, *she being free of wedlock* [author's italics], but with marriage still existing between the same Duke John and [his wife] Constance, and begot offspring of her'.⁶⁸ The compelling reasons for accepting the statements in this letter as the truth have been previously stated, and therefore we must accept that Katherine was no longer married to Hugh when she became John's mistress and conceived a child by him, although he was already married to Constance.

That means that they could not have become lovers until November 1371 at the earliest, and it makes a nonsense of claims that they had begun their affair in the lifetime of the Duchess Blanche, and of Froissart's assertions that Katherine 'had been mistress of the Duke both before and after his marriage with the Princess Constance' and while Hugh Swynford was alive. 'Both during and after the knight's

lifetime [he claims] Duke John of Lancaster had always loved and maintained this Lady Katherine.' Since Froissart incorrectly states in the same passage that John and Katherine had three children, not four, his sources can hardly have been reliable. He was, after all, writing long after these events.

John and Katherine's statement to the Pope also exposes as blatant propaganda Richard III's proclamation of 1485, which was designed to impugn the claim to the throne of his rival, Henry Tudor, who was descended from John of Gaunt through John Beaufort: Richard asserted that Henry 'was descended of bastard blood both of the father's side and of the mother's side ... His mother was daughter unto John [Beaufort], Duke of Somerset, son unto John [Beaufort], Earl of Somerset, son unto Dame Katherine Swynford, and of her in *double* [author's italics] adultery begotten, whereby it evidently appeareth that no tide can or may be in him.' Richard conveniently ignored the fact that he himself was descended from John of Gaunt through Katherine Swynford.

It is very unlikely that Katherine was at the Savoy when John returned there in November 1371. It is more probable that she came to his remembrance when he heard of the death of Hugh Swynford, which was perhaps what prompted him to find a place for her in his new wife's household. It was quite possible for the news of Hugh's death to have reached England in little over two weeks — in 1386, it took John of Gaunt sixteen days to sail from England to Spain. The Duke must have heard of it by late January, when he was back at the Savoy and probably engaged in assembling a household for his wife, ready for her arrival in London. Since Hugh was his retainer and vassal, John would have naturally taken an interest in his widow and dependants, and the disposal of his estates, and it would have been quite legitimate for Katherine to inform him of the dire financial straits in which she now found herself, and appeal to him for aid.

He had probably not seen Katherine for about three years, and maturity and vulnerability may have made her appear more beautiful and alluring; she must, for him, have had too those indefinable qualities known as charm and sex appeal. Was it her fair Hainaulter beauty that appealed to him? Did it remind him of the 'full feminine visage' of his mother, Queen Philippa, or the white-blonde rounded loveliness of his late wife Blanche, or the charms of Marie de St Hilaire, another Hainaulter? If these are indicative of John's taste in women, then the theory that Katherine herself was fair and voluptuous appears even more credible. Certainly for John,

Katherine's extraordinary beauty eclipsed the charms of Constance. But even if the first attraction was physical, the enduring nature of his love for her must have been rooted in far more than beauty and sex, for she was intelligent, cultivated and accomplished, and could thus share in his sophisticated tastes and interests. Theirs must have been what Shakespeare later called 'a marriage of true minds'.

Much of what Katherine saw in John is obvious: he was royal, authoritative and powerful, a heady and sexy combination, especially when combined with aristocratic good looks, a tall, lean and muscular body, a cultivated mind and an attractive personality. More than that, he was a man who knew about love, and who had been brought up to treat women chivalrously and with respect.

John had not found love with his bride. There is no way of knowing whether they were incompatible from the start, or if Katherine's appearance in John's life so early in the marriage put paid to any chance of him growing closer to Constance. For despite its auspicious beginnings, John's second marriage appears never to have been particularly happy. There is no evidence of any real love or affection between him and his wife, just mutual courtesy and respect, and although Constance was beautiful, she does not seem to have inspired any passion in her husband. In fact, the young Duchess, far from dwelling on thoughts of love, was more probably consumed with a deep hatred for the usurper who had murdered her father and seized his throne, and apparently saw her husband chiefly as a means of regaining it. She does not seem to have made much attempt to integrate in England, and was rarely at court; in her youth, she had led a narrow, miserable existence, and even after her marriage, although she kept regal state, she preferred to live in seclusion with her Castilian ladies in the Spanish manner, residing mainly at the Duke's magnificent castles at Hertford and Tutbury,⁷ biding her time until she could return to her native Castile. Perhaps she found the English climate uncongenial, or the people strange and unintelligible. Communication with her husband was probably inhibited by the fact that she spoke little English and he only limited Castilian: seventeen years after their marriage, he had difficulty in following an oration in that language. Not that they would have had much in common, apart from Castile, for unlike Katherine, Constance was more pious than accomplished. All John seems to have shared with her was a burning ambition to regain her throne, and thus he would often defer to her judgement when it came to Castilian affairs. In every other respect, he belonged to Katherine Swynford.

Katherine, by contrast, had a shared history with the Duke; having lived in his household for many years, in attendance on his wife and children, she probably knew him quite well, and she had witnessed his devotion to Blanche, whom she herself seems to have loved and revered. Possibly the recall of those happy times created a shared bond between Katherine and John; each had memories to treasure, and the poignant remembrance of grief. But it was now more than three years since Blanche's death, long enough for her widower to have recovered sufficiently to love again.

John's early experience of love and his happy first marriage would have awakened him to the joy to be found in sharing his private life with a responsive woman, and we may see his need for Katherine as a tribute to Blanche, and perhaps an attempt to recreate the idyllic domestic joys of his youth. And the fact that Katherine was a Hainaulter, and possibly a distant relative, was probably an added bond: John himself was half-Hainaulter through his mother, and throughout his life was to demonstrate that affinity by showing friendship to the Low Countries.

The most probable theory is that Katherine and John became lovers soon after she moved into Constance's household in the spring of 1372, when he was thirty-two and she about ten years younger, and helping to look after his children. In this context, Armitage-Smith's delightfully Edwardian suggestion that the Duke's visits to the nursery facilitated a rapidly growing intimacy may be accurate. The speed with which the supposedly grieving widow fell into John's bed suggests that her marriage had never been much more than a convenient arrangement, and that her sorrow for Hugh did not run deep. After all, she had not seen him during the sixteen months before his death, during which time she may well have grown used to living without him. And we might also wonder if Katherine had for years cherished a secret, unvoiced desire for John.

After his grant of 1 May 1372, there is further evidence of John's interest in 'our very dear *damoiselle* Katherine de Swynford', and his concern for her financial problems, a concern that was far in excess of the usual consideration shown by an overlord to the widow of one of his knights. On 15 May 1372, again at the Savoy, he generously increased her permanent annuity from the Duchy of Lancaster (which originally must have been awarded during or after her years in Blanche's household) from twenty marks (£2,231) to fifty (£5,578), on account of 'the good and agreeable service she has given to our dear companion [Blanche], whom God pardon, and for the very great

affection that our said companion had for the said Katherine'.

When a vassal died leaving an under-aged heir and a widow provided with a dower, his estates and property were normally taken into the hands of his overlord, who would then administer them as he thought fit until the heir attained his majority; the wardship of that heir was assigned or sold to the person designated to raise him, and such arrangements could be very profitable for all concerned. Sir Hugh Swynford's estates had therefore reverted for the time being to the King and the Duke of Lancaster, but — unusually — both now broke with custom and acted swiftly to ameliorate Katherine's financial plight.

On 8 June, Edward III stepped in, doubtless at John's behest, and ordered his escheator to assign Katherine her dower, on condition she swore an oath not to marry without the King's licence; that dower was formally assigned on 26 June, after she had taken that oath. By this means, she gained control of Kettlethorpe during the minority of her son. On 20 June, at the Savoy, again on account of the 'good and agreeable service' she had rendered to Blanche, John granted 'our well-loved Lady Katherine' wardship of all the lands and tenements that her late husband had held of the Honour of Richmond in Lincolnshire, 'which is now held of us because of the minority of Thomas, son and heir of the said Sir Hugh'. Katherine was 'to have and hold' these lands 'with all the profits appertaining to them from us and our heirs till the full age of the said heir, with nothing to render to us or our heirs'. The only exceptions were the marriage fee due when Thomas took a wife, and 'what is due to the Church', which refers to Hugh's two advowsons, the right to appoint priests to the churches of Kettlethorpe and Coleby. Thus Katherine gained control of one third of the manor of Coleby.

On 23 June, John made Katherine a further gift of three bucks, which he had probably killed himself whilst hunting near Hertford, and on 28 June he ordered that she be provided with oaks from his estates, presumably so that she could undertake building repairs and improvements at Kettlethorpe.

The Inquisition Post Mortem on Sir Hugh Swynford was taken soon after 25 April 1372 at Navenby, nine miles south of Lincoln, and on 24 June in Lincoln itself. Thomas Swynford, 'aged four years and more', was recognised as his father's heir, but Kettlethorpe and Coleby were still in a poor state and worth little or nothing. Again, Edward III and John of Gaunt came to Katherine's rescue. On 12 September

1372, in return for a fee of £20 (£6.694) to be paid at the Exchequer, the King granted Katherine the remaining two thirds of the manor of Coleby, and the marriage of her son until such time as he reached twenty-one.

Thanks to his influence over his father the King, and through his own generosity, John had provided handsomely for Katherine, ensuring her rights to the control of Hugh's estates and the disposition and upbringing of her son, and by granting her a substantial annuity. The bountiful care and consideration shown to Katherine by John of Gaunt and the King, and the speed with which her affairs were settled, is proof that she was very highly regarded in royal circles, and is also indicative of her being in regular contact with the Duke, as a member of his household and, indeed, probably much more than that. Ever a man to take his responsibilities seriously, John had done his best to ensure that she and her children did not suffer want, but there was more to his generosity than this: by the summer of 1372, Katherine was almost certainly expecting his child, and he no doubt wished to provide handsomely for them both.

Katherine was not the only woman who was to bear the Duke an infant: the Duchess Constance was also pregnant, and on 6 June, at the Savoy, her husband sent orders to Sir William de Chiselden, his receiver of Leicester, to send for 'Elyot the wise woman' ('wise woman' being a common term for a midwife) to attend 'our well-loved companion the Queen' at Hertford Castle 'with all the haste that in any manner you can'.⁸⁵ Elyot had delivered one or more of Blanche of Lancaster's babies - John mentions in 1372 that she had attended 'our dearly loved companion, whom God keep in His command'; his reference to 'our well-beloved Elyot, midwife of Leicester', and the payment of an annuity to 'Eleyne, midwife' (who must be the same person) out of the revenues of Leicester in 1377-8 suggest he had enduring confidence in her, for she was also to assist at at least one of Katherine Swynford's confinements.

John had sent to Chiselden his 'well-loved esquire' John Raynald, 'who will inform you fully of this matter' and who was to accompany Elyot to Hertford. Considerately, John stipulated that Chiselden was to order for her journey 'a chariot or a horse or any other manner that seems best to you for her ease'. The urgency implied in the Duke's commands suggests that the birth of Constance's child was reasonably imminent -he would have had to allow a week or more for his orders to reach Leicester and for Elyot to travel to Hertford — and that this pregnancy had resulted from the bride conceiving soon after her

marriage in September, which would account for her remaining in Devon and Dorset from November to February, at that stage of pregnancy when morning sickness and debility are at their most troublesome. The date of her child's birth is not recorded, and since it was not until 31 March 1373 that Edward III rewarded Katherine Swynford with 20 marks (£2,231) for bringing news of it to him, several historians are of the opinion that the birth occurred nearer to that date. However, given the other circumstances, the fact that months could elapse before royal rewards were actually paid or recorded, and the delay in payment perhaps being accounted for by Katherine herself being absent from the Lancastrian household for some time due to her own pregnancy, it is more likely that Constance's child was born in the summer of 1372 at Hertford Castle. Gifts of wine were sent to Hertford that summer, and the Duke was there on 7 July, probably to see his new child.

Disappointingly — for the royal parents were doubtless anxious for a boy to inherit the crown that John meant to wrest from Enrique of Trastamara — the baby was a girl. She was named Katherine — or Catalina, as her mother called her, and as she would one day be known in Castile — and styled Katherine d'Espagne. Her Christian name had never been used by the Castilian royal family, and was rare in the House of Plantagenet, so one is tempted to wonder if John of Gaunt chose it, and why. Was the choice prompted by Katherine Swynford, out of devotion to St Katherine?

Or was John himself so entranced with Katherine that he was blind to the implications of using her beloved name for the child his wife had borne him? Of course, the choice of name may have sprung from some other association entirely: St Katherine may have been one of Constance's favourite saints, as well as John's.

Katherine's conveyance of the news of Catalina's birth to the King suggests that she had been in attendance; having borne at least four children of her own at a young age, she would have been able to reassure and support Constance through her ordeal. But as soon as her own pregnancy became obvious, a pregnancy that could not have been her husband's doing, she would have been obliged to resign her post and return to Kettlethorpe.

The war with France was not going well at this time. The French were making inroads into Aquitaine and attacking Brittany. In June, at Hertford, in order to retain the friendship of a valuable ally against France, John surrendered the earldom of Richmond to John de

Montfort, Duke of Brittany, in whose family it had previously been for centuries, receiving other lands in exchange. That same month, Edward III resolved on a naval offensive against France, whereupon, on 1 July, John undertook to serve overseas for a year.

John was probably at Wallingford Castle on 11 July, attending the marriage of his younger brother, Edmund of Langley, Earl of Cambridge, to Constance's younger sister, Isabella of Castile, an alliance that had been arranged by John of Gaunt to bolster England's links with the future monarchy of Castile and to 'save [Isabella] from her enemies'. It was also seen as a way of preserving England's claims to Castile should Constance die in childbirth.

On the same day as the wedding of Edmund and Isabella, John of Gaunt summoned all his retainers to attend him on the coming campaign, and then went north for a few weeks' hunting in Leicester Forest before joining his army at Sandwich before 18 August. It was there, on 30 August, that he granted the annuity to Philippa Chaucer in recognition of her past and future services to the Duchess Constance. We might conclude that Philippa had been instrumental in helping her young mistress to settle in a strange land, and had perhaps assisted her during her pregnancy and confinement, and was helping to look after her baby; and we might wonder if John's grant to Philippa Chaucer was at Katherine's behest.

On 31 August, John sailed for Gascony with his father the King and the Black Prince. For Edward III and the Prince, this would be their last military adventure, and for Katherine and John, the first of many partings occasioned by the war. The expedition was a disaster, with ships smashed or blown off course by contrary winds and gales and many lives lost, and after two hellish storm-tossed months in the Channel, the remains of the fleet limped home, having accomplished nothing.

During John's absence, Katherine would have been preparing for her coming confinement. Her baby probably arrived in the winter of 1372-3; by this reckoning, John Beaufort's age, as given in Richard II's grant of 1392, must be inaccurate. In which case, if Constance had given birth in the summer of 1372, Katherine's pregnancy would not then have been apparent; she had probably left the Duchess's household soon afterwards and returned to Kettlethorpe. Her child was perhaps born there: the delivery of oaks in June 1372, on the Duke's orders, might have been intended for the refurbishment of the manor house, to make it a fit place in which Katherine could bear or

rear his child; if the calculations above are correct, it would have been around June when her pregnancy became a certainty. It is possible though that Katherine actually gave birth to this son in Lincoln, and that he was the child for whose baptism in February 1373 rich cloths were provided.

In childbed, Katherine had succeeded where Constance had failed, for she had borne a son, a boy who would be known as John Beaufort of Lancaster; he was named John for his father, with whom he was always to be 'a great favourite', and Beaufort after the lordship of Beaufort in Champagne, which had once been held by the Duke as part of his Lancastrian inheritance. In 1369, John of Gaunt had lost Beaufort to the French through the treachery of one of his vassals,⁹⁹ thus it was a safe name to give to his bastard son by Katherine Swynford: it was a name associated with the Duke, yet the lordship was no longer part of, and could not therefore prejudice, the inheritance he would leave his lawful heir. It used often to be claimed that John's children by Katherine Swynford were born at Beaufort Castle, but that would not have been possible, for he had sold it years before, and had never visited it anyway.

John Beaufort's early years were probably spent at Kettlethorpe. The pattern of John's grants to Katherine, some of them concerning its refurbishment, some of them handsome gifts, may indicate the dates of birth of their other children, and certainly suggests that the manor was being made a fit place for them to be brought up in. Kettlethorpe was a remote village with a tiny population, an ideal setting for discreet confinements and the raising of royal bastards whose existence was better kept secret -at least for the present.

Certainly the lovers were discreet, at least to begin with — had they not been, the world would soon have known of their affair, and we would not have to rely on inference and speculation in determining the circumstances in which it began. Costain argues that it was Katherine who insisted on secrecy in the early years of the liaison — she was, after all, newly widowed - but there were political imperatives to be considered too: John would not have wished to openly dishonour his new wife when all his hopes were centred on claiming the crown of Castile in her right. Thus the need for discretion was probably mutual, and it ensured that for some years to come, his affair with Katherine was conducted in secrecy and with great circumspection.

'Blinded by Desire'

The love and friendship between John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford was to endure for more than a quarter of a century. For great lords, marriage was normally a political affair, and love a private one.¹ The Church and the public at large might frown on extramarital liaisons, but they were an accepted part of aristocratic life, given that love rarely followed marriage. Because John's liaison with Katherine was to last for so long, many people in court circles must have come to regard it as unremarkable. In the meantime, John would treat his young wife with respect and courtesy, for she was his Duchess and a queen in her own right; but clearly his heart was Katherine's, and would probably remain so until death.

It was quite permissible, in a world in which courtly love held sway over relationships between the sexes, for a man like John of Gaunt to pay open court to a lady who was not his wife; but Katherine was a widow, who for the first year of her widowhood was expected to be unattainable; she was of far lower degree than he, for all that she might have been distantly related, and had nothing more than herself to offer him; and John was a newly married man. Yet where Katherine was concerned, he seems to have been unable to restrain his passion: 'he was blinded by desire, fearing neither God nor shame amongst men'.² Was Chaucer thinking of his sister-in-law and John of Gaunt when, in the 1380s, he wrote, 'You wise ones, proud ones, worthy ones and all, never scorn love . . . For love can lay his hands on every creature . . . The strongest men are overcome, and those most notable and highest in degree.'³ John's younger brother, Thomas of Woodstock, would later put it more succinctly, calling him (says Froissart) a 'doting fool' for loving Katherine Swynford so utterly and so enduringly.

Yet, sadly for those romantics who would prefer to believe that the Duke stayed true to Katherine within the limits of their adulterous relationship, there is some evidence that he had fleeting sexual encounters with other women during the course of it. In 1381, he was publicly to confess that he had committed the sin of lechery with Katherine herself 'and many others in his wife's household'. Certainly this reputation for lechery endured. Francis Thynne, Lancaster Herald

under Elizabeth I, and a commentator on Thomas Speght's edition of Chaucer, asserted that John of Gaunt 'had many paramours in his youth, and was not very continent in his age'. In *The Boke of the Duchesse*, on which Thynne must have based his assertion, Chaucer has John recalling that from his youth he had 'paid tribute as a devotee to love, most unrestrainedly, and joyfully become his thrall, with willing body, heart and all'. When contemporary chroniclers spoke of the Duke as a lecher and 'great fornicator', they may not have been commenting solely on his liaison with Katherine Swynford, as is often claimed. Then there is some fifteenth-century evidence that John died of a venereal disease, which — if true — he is unlikely to have contracted as a result of long years of fidelity to the same mistress.⁶ Even if this evidence is unsound, the fact that the allegation was made at all is proof that, forty years after his death, the charges of promiscuity were remembered and believable.

In his confession of 1381, John's reference to 'his wife' can only be to Constance; there is no evidence that he was unfaithful to Blanche, although it is of course possible. Thynne and Chaucer were obviously referring to John's early amorous encounters: today, we know only of his affair with Marie de St Hilaire, but there were seemingly others; possibly the occasional grants to various ladies in the *Register* are rewards for favours bestowed. Thynne's comment about John not being continent in his age probably refers to his notorious relationship with Katherine Swynford. But the Duke's own confession, and Chaucer's portrayal of him as a man who unrestrainedly pursued sexual pleasure, suggest that he found it hard to remain physically faithful. During the years of his affair with Katherine, they were often apart, and he would have had many opportunities for straying. His taking many women of his wife's household to bed supports the theory that he and Constance did not enjoy a satisfying conjugal relationship — they had just two, possibly three children in twenty-three years - and suggests that on his visits to her, he often abstained from her bed and assuaged his needs elsewhere. For great lords, such casual dalliance was easy, and many regarded it as their privilege; in aristocratic society, these things were accepted. Fidelity, and the pursuit of the courtly ideal, were conceits that masked the indulgence of lust. And probably John's amours were fleeting and purely physical - and made no impact on his obviously deep feelings for Katherine Swynford.

Katherine may only have found out about these casual affairs in 1381, after John made his public confession. Throughout their years together, he appears to have treated her with dignity, discretion and

generosity, and perhaps never admitted to what he considered to be insignificant lapses.

The mediaeval Church, however, essentially regarded all sexual acts as potentially sinful, following St Augustine, who wrote: 'There is nothing that degrades the manly spirit more than the attractiveness of females and contact with their bodies.' St Paul's dictum, 'It is better to marry than to burn', implied that celibacy was the ideal state. Even within marriage, sex was meant to be only for the purpose of procreation: according to the ascetic St Jerome, a man and wife who indulged in carnal lust for pleasure were no better than adulterers, for 'in truth, all love is disgraceful, and with regard to one's own wife, excessive love is. The wise man must love his wife with judgement, not with passion. Let him curb his transports of voluptuousness, and not let himself be urged precipitately to indulge in coition. Nothing is more vile than to love a wife like a mistress.' Certain sexual positions were forbidden, as were masturbation and coitus interruptus, and those found guilty of indulging in oral sex might incur a penance lasting three years. You could not make love on Sundays, holy days or saints' days, or during Lent, pregnancy or menstruation. For the devout, married life must have been a continual battle with temptation.

There was therefore no hope that the Church would ever officially look upon the adulterous relationship of John and Katherine with anything other than disapproval; each would have been regarded as equally guilty, and irrevocably damned.

In practice, however, attitudes were more lax. By the fourteenth century, the promiscuity of the clergy had become a byword, and many in holy orders took a relaxed and worldly view of immorality. Whereas in the thirteenth century adulterers had been publicly whipped, they were now more likely to be forced to do public penance, going in procession to church wearing just a sheet and carrying a candle. But no one ever called for the mighty Duke of Lancaster and his mistress to be punished in such a humiliating way.

The laity were generally tolerant of sexual licence, albeit in men, blaming it on the frailty and insatiability of women. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* reveal just how licentious fourteenth-century society was, and how relaxed with regard to fornication. The aristocracy were sophisticated to a degree in their attitudes to sex outside marriage: it was accepted that tided men took mistresses or had casual sexual encounters. The royal court, as we

have seen, was a hotbed of promiscuity, due to the financial inability of many young knights or gentlemen to marry. But where the wives and daughters of the nobility were concerned, chastity was the order of the day, for dynastic bloodlines and inheritances had to be protected, and soiled goods were of little value in the marriage market. Thus the purity of noblewomen was jealously guarded. Females of lower rank were considered fair game, and more responsive than their betters, and any gently born woman who so far forgot herself as to have an affair outside wedlock usually lost her reputation irrevocably. It is easy to see, therefore, why Katherine Swynford was so bitterly disparaged in the monastic chronicles.

When it came to bastardy, the world could be a cruel place. A bastard could not officially inherit lands or titles, nor obtain preferment in the Church. Yet these barriers could be circumvented by bequeathing property or by dispensations, and when it came to the aristocracy, much could be gained from a sympathetic monarch. Moreover, being the bastard child of a great lord conferred nobility, inspired deference, and entitled one to bear the paternal arms differenced with a bend sinister denoting illegitimacy. The infant John Beaufort's arms were the leopards and lilies of England on a bend, mounted on a shield of blue and white, the Lancastrian colours. Fathers were seen as having a duty to provide equally for their legitimate and illegitimate children.⁷

Katherine must have embarked upon her affair with John of Gaunt knowing exactly what she was doing, and being aware of the risks she was taking and the penalties that society could impose. That she chose to be his mistress in the light of this knowledge suggests that she loved him enough for the consequences not to matter, and that this, and the protection, security and benefits that such a relationship could afford her, were not only welcome to her, but of more importance than the stigma attached to being a partner in adultery and losing her reputation.

Much of what we know of Katherine Swynford's years as John of Gaunt's mistress is recorded in *John of Gaunt's Register*, which survives for the periods 1372-6 and 1379-83. This covers much of the period in question, although three vital years are missing, as are the years following their parting. These missing records would surely have contained more clues as to the truth of the relationship between Katherine and John, so their loss is only to be lamented. Nevertheless, as will shortly become clear, there is much that can be inferred from the information that *has* come down to us.

John of Gaunt spent the Christmas of 1372 at Hertford Castle with Constance. Game from Ashdown Forest in Sussex and five dozen rabbits from Aldbourne were delivered there for the Christmas feasts, while the Duke's valet brought him cloth of gold, furs, silk and linen from his wardrobe at the Savoy. On Christmas Eve, Alyne Gerberge was dispatched to the Savoy to collect some jewels and precious stones that the Duke intended to give as New Year's gifts, as well as jewels given by Edward III and the Black Prince to the Duchess Constance, who doubtless wanted to wear them during the festive season. It is tempting to speculate that some of the other jewels were intended as presents for Katherine Swynford, whose New Year gifts from her royal lover were almost never recorded in his *Register*. Her presents were probably paid for out of the large sums of money that the Duke frequently arranged to be 'given into my own hands for my own secret business'. Philippa Chaucer's gifts were recorded, however, and at this New Year of 1373, she received six silver-gilt buttons attached to an embroidered strip of fabric called a 'buttoner', which indicates that, after less than a year in Constance's service, she had become highly regarded by both the Duke and Duchess. Her life would now have been centred mainly upon the Lancastrian household, which was as well, because royal duties were keeping her and her husband increasingly apart: Chaucer was in Italy at this time on official business, and would not return until the following May.

John was still at Hertford on 10 January 1373, but soon afterwards he moved to the Savoy, where he remained until June, apart from a brief visit to Hertford in early February to celebrate the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary with his wife. Katherine Swynford, meanwhile, had given birth to John's child, but was probably back at the Savoy by 31 March, for it was on that date that Edward III rewarded her for bringing news of Catalina of Lancaster's birth to him the previous year.

Writing after 1378, the chronicler Knighton describes Katherine as being in the Duchess Constance's household. Certainly she would have been there from time to time, but probably not as a lady-in-waiting, for none of the many grants to her by the Duke would be in made in consideration of her good service to his second wife, although several were awarded in regard to her devotion to his first. Instead, John had found another post for Katherine that would facilitate her being near him as often as possible, and which would be eminently suited to her character and talents. He appointed her *magistra* — which means mistress, directress, leader or, more loosely, governess — to his daughters, Philippa, now thirteen, and Elizabeth, ten, and perhaps to

his six-year-old heir Henry, too, until a governor was appointed for the boy in 1374. Effectively, Blanche's children would now have two stepmothers - the Duchess Constance, and Katherine Swynford, who was mistress in different senses to them and their father.

We do not know the exact date on which Katherine was appointed governess, and it has been suggested that she had fulfilled this role whilst she was in Blanche of Lancaster's household. But she would have been quite young at that time, and frequently pregnant; moreover, continuity would have been an important factor, and there is no evidence to show that she was employed by the Duke between 1368 and 1372, when it appears that others were caring for the ducal daughters. An undated letter of c. 1376 from a woman called Maud to John of Gaunt identifies Maud as a former nurse to young Philippa," and in 1370, Alyne Gerberge was rewarded with a lifetime annuity for caring for Philippa in the aftermath of Blanche's death. In November 1371, we find that Lady Wake was serving as governess to all three of the Duke's children. But she would not have been able to remain in the post of governess for long because she was preoccupied with bearing her husband a dozen children throughout the 1370s and 1380s. So by 1373, there was definitely a vacancy to be filled.

Katherine had the requisite skills and experience, and she had certainly helped to look after Blanche's children during their mother's lifetime, which would have been a factor that John must have taken into account when choosing her as his daughters' governess, because in everything that mattered, she was going to be a mother to them. John's children were still sharing a joint household in 1372, so the likeliest date for Katherine's preferment was after the birth of John Beaufort, around the spring of 1373. It may be that the children had been looked after in the interim by the *damoiselle* Amy de Melbourne, who was rewarded in 1375 by John of Gaunt for her care of them, or that Amy was an assistant to both Lady Wake and Katherine Swynford. From 1372, Amy and Alyne Gerberge were entrusted to look after the jewel coffers of the Duke's womenfolk, and Alyne was then not only caring for Philippa but also dressing the Duchess Constance's hair and setting in place her coronet. We know that the Duke thought highly of Amy because he sent her a pipe of wine each Christmas from 1372 onwards.¹⁵

Katherine's appointment as governess was timely, because John was travelling abroad and expected to be away for some time. The war was going catastrophically, and England needed to intervene quickly,

otherwise Aquitaine, that precious jewel in the Plantagenet crown, would be irrevocably lost. On 1 March 1373, John had begun to gather an army, having sealed an indenture to go campaigning in France for a year.

Katherine must by now have faced up to the painful fact that the demands of his position, and the likely necessity for her to spend long periods in the country discreetly bearing his children, might mean that they would often be apart.

On 23 April, the Duke gave orders for Tutbury Castle, which had been damaged in a storm, to be put in good repair, so that his wife and children could reside there during his absence in France. Tutbury, where Blanche had died, was a mighty fortress perched high above the banks of the River Dove, and lay eleven miles south-west of Derby. John of Gaunt, who often stayed there for the excellent hunting in the vicinity, had built the red sandstone gatehouse in 1362, and carried out many works there over the years, so as to make the castle a fitting residence for his Queen. Below the castle stood St Mary's Priory, a Benedictine house under the Duke's patronage.

By now, Katherine had perhaps taken up her duties as governess. In the fourteenth century, a 'mistress's' role was to supervise the upbringing of the girls committed to her charge until the day they married, and to set a good and virtuous example for them to follow.⁸ The emphasis was more on character training than the acquisition of skills, although learning the conduct expected of high-born females was important too. Formal education was not normally part of the governess's remit: the teaching of the Scriptures and devotional works, reading, writing, English, French and perhaps a little Latin would have been undertaken by household chaplains. Katherine, however, was unusual in that she had grown up in one of the most cultivated courts in Christendom, and was part of an aristocratic circle in which learning in women was encouraged, so she herself may have imparted some of her own knowledge to the two princesses.

Above all, noble girls were to be protected from the snares of the flesh and the wiles of men, which was why so many were brought up in convents. In this respect, Katherine was perhaps not the wisest choice as governess, and her appointment may have led to a few knowledgeable eyebrows being lifted, but in all others she was eminently fitted for the office, otherwise John of Gaunt would surely not have appointed her; in thrall as he was to Katherine's charms, he could never have compromised the education of his daughters, nor

their moral welfare, for both were princesses of the blood and expected to make good political marriages. This argues that Katherine was discreet and did not flaunt her position in any way, and also that her intimate connection with John of Gaunt was not widely known at this time, nor her reputation compromised. Had it been, her appointment would have been cause for open scandal, which it was not. Chaucer may be referring obliquely to Katherine in 'The Physician's Tale' where he wryly observes that governesses with a past were well suited to be poachers turned gamekeepers, but this was written years later, and does not reflect contemporary opinion in the early 1370s. Above all, with the crown of Castile beckoning, John would not have wished to offend his wife by his indiscriminate promotion of his mistress.

Katherine would have been responsible for teaching Philippa and Elizabeth the accomplishments that would befit them to adorn courts and rule their own establishments: courtesy, conversation, good carriage, dancing, singing, embroidery, courtly games and household management. These were probably all skills in which Katherine herself was more than proficient. Although she was only about twenty-three, she was already the mother of at least four children, and experienced not only in the ways of courts, but also in running her own establishment at Kettlethorpe. Lady Wake, who was the same age, had been even younger when she looked after the Lancastrian siblings. Katherine was pious too, and this would have had some bearing on her influence over her charges. She was also responsible for their diet, their clothing and the accoutrements of their chamber.

Although Katherine was indeed in many ways qualified for her post, it seems to have been something of a sinecure, for clearly she was not always resident with her charges, and it would appear that the demands of the Duke and her own family came first. Thus we must conclude that being appointed governess was in part a ploy to lend Katherine respectability while ensuring that she could remain within the Duke's orbit and be available when he needed her, not only in bed but also at board, because she probably acted as hostess and graced his table in the absence of the Duchess. Yet there is evidence to show that she did spend a lot of time with Philippa and Elizabeth, that she indeed fulfilled her official role as their governess, and that even if she did so only on a part-time basis, she certainly had overall control of her charges. During her absences, she seems to have delegated their care to others such as Amy de Melbourne, while *John of Gaunt's Register* also records occasional payments to ladies with whom the two princesses were sometimes sent to stay.

Occupying an official position gave Katherine a legitimate reason for residing in one or other of the ducal households. Such evidence as we have indicates that her duties and commitments, official or otherwise, sometimes necessitated her lodging with the Duchess Constance's household, something that could not have happened unless Katherine was the soul of discretion and tact, given that John desired not to offend his wife, in whom he had invested all his political ambitions. Yet it appears that the Duchess's Castilian ladies were already aware in 1373 that Katherine was John's mistress. Their gossiping so annoyed the Duke that he packed them all off to Nuneaton Abbey, hoping that the Abbess would teach them discretion. By the end of 1374, they were chafing at the conventual regime at Nuneaton, and begging to be allowed to leave, but it was not until 1375 that John relented and sent them to five in Leicester with some of his trusted retainers; later, he arranged marriages for a number of them.

If her ladies knew what was going on between the Duke and Katherine, the chances are that Constance did too. It has been suggested that her Spanish pride was affronted by Katherine, but it may be that the young Duchess took a more realistic view of such matters. She herself, after all, was the daughter of a royal mistress, and she came from a royal house famed for its high rate of bastardy. Preoccupied as she was with regaining her throne, and preferring to remain secluded with her Castilian entourage, she was perhaps relieved to know that her husband's sexual needs were being met by another woman. Her later acknowledgement that she herself was at fault with regard to the failure of their marriage suggests she was aware that she had made little effort to be a loving wife, or had defaulted in some other way. If she never loved her husband, she could hardly blame him for seeking love elsewhere, and perhaps she was not unduly troubled by the fact that it was John's passion for Katherine that was preventing him from making a success of their marriage. Furthermore, in the years to come, Katherine's baseborn children by John would pose no threat to Constance's own legitimate issue. Nor, it appears, did Katherine ever seek to interfere with John's plans to conquer Castile, which was the most important thing in view in Constance's life, and which, during the first two years of her marriage, seemed a realistically attainable goal. Hence Constance would have regarded her sojourn in England as purely temporary, and might well have reasoned that, once Castile was regained, she and John would live there, King and Queen in their own realm, and that her position would be unassailable. Thus Katherine could hardly have posed any real threat to Constance.

In May 1373, the Duke's ships began assembling at Dover and Sandwich. John was very busy with his preparations, but on the 12th, at the Savoy, he gave orders to John de Stafford, his receiver in Lincoln, that Katherine's allowance be paid promptly during his absence: 'We want and we command that you pay immediately to our very dear and well-beloved Dame Katherine de Swynford her annuity given by us to her, taken from the issues you will receive and in the manner that our letters of guarantee had specified; and see to it that there is no delay at the term of the payment, and no default. These my letters are a guarantee.'

Katherine seems to have either visited, or stayed briefly with John at his headquarters at the manor of Northbourne, a grange of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, that he had commandeered, which lay four miles west of Deal in Kent. Here he sojourned from 27 June to 16 July. Katherine's presence at Northbourne underlines how important a person she now was in John's life, and shows that he wanted to spend as much time as possible with her before the long parting that lay ahead. Presumably he hoped she would join him in Castile once he was established as its ruler: given the irregular domestic arrangements of previous Castilian kings, one mistress discreetly kept could hardly have offended public opinion.

It would appear that while Katherine was at Northbourne with John, she complained that his orders for the prompt payment of her allowance had not been obeyed, for on 27 June, clearly angered, he wrote to John de Stafford commanding him to pay 'our very dear and beloved Dame Katherine de Swynford the annuity that we have granted her; this must be paid to her in the manner ordered in the letter of guarantee. See to it that this is done without delay, and without any kind of excuse.' Either John de Stafford had just been dilatory in carrying out his orders, or — as Silva-Vigier suggests — he was being deliberately obstructive towards a woman of whom he did not approve.

Katherine must have said her farewells and departed on or soon after 27 June, as it was before then that John promised to send gifts of venison and wood to her at Kettlethorpe. On that day, he informed the warden of his park at Gringley, Nottinghamshire: 'We have granted to our dear and well-beloved Dame Katherine de Swynford, as our gift, two deer from one of our parks, and a third from another of our parks, as you will judge to be the best.'

John de Stafford, perhaps still simmering with disapproval, was also

commanded to dispatch to Katherine 'six chariots of wood for fuel and three oaks suitable for building, which we have given to the said Dame Katherine; these are to be taken from one of our parks, which you will judge to be most suitable'.

Preoccupied as he was with military matters, John had yet found time to send some comforts to cheer his love during his absence. The oaks, of course, were to be used for the improvements she was making at Kettlethorpe, which suggests she did not immediately go to her charges at Tutbury. On 6 July, John gave orders for the supply of coal and wood to Tutbury Castle for 'the Queen of Castile' and his four legitimate children.²⁵ The Duke's womenfolk were to remain at Tutbury for a year; as governess, Katherine must have spent some time there during that period with Philippa and Elizabeth, while Philippa Chaucer seems to have been a constant presence in the household.

The Duke, who had been appointed Captain-General in France and Aquitaine on 12 June, sailed to France late in July with an army of perhaps six thousand men, and there undertook one of the most astonishing and controversial actions of the Hundred Years War. On 4 August, he began his famous - or notorious — *grande chevauchie* (great cavalry ravage) through France, marching his army unopposed from Calais to Bordeaux, his aim to relieve Aquitaine then cross the Pyrenees and force Enrique of Trastamara to surrender his ill-gotten crown. This was a daring show of strength designed to intimidate the French, divert them from mounting a naval offensive against England, and bait them into giving battle, but they held aloof, and during five months of terrible but futile marching, plundering and looting, the Duke took not a single fortress or town. Unwilling to compromise his honour by turning back, he and his army pressed on further and further south, only to find themselves increasingly short of funds, food and morale. As winter encroached, the way became hard, and led them through the barren mountains of the Massif Central, where they encountered ambushes and bitter weather, and the flood-ravaged lands of Aquitaine. Many men and nearly all the horses fell sick and died, armour and booty had to be abandoned, and even the knights were reduced to begging for bread.

At Christmas, having long since abandoned all thoughts of pressing on into Castile, and suffering from 'great bodily fatigue' and the loss of his customary good spirits, John limped into Bordeaux with an army tragically halved by death or desertion. All that now remained of the once-mighty Plantagenet empire in France was Calais and the coastal strip between Bordeaux and Bayonne. Nevertheless, John had held off

the enemy and probably saved Bordeaux; far from his military reputation being in the dust, as historians used to conclude, his great march was regarded by the French as 'most honourable to the English'. In England, however, it came in for scathing criticism, and he was compared very unfavourably with his brother, the Black Prince.³¹ In January 1374, John concluded a truce with the French, then immediately began planning another campaign, but in March, when the Pope intervened and demanded a new truce, hostilities were suspended.

After an absence of nine months, John surrendered his lieutenancy of Aquitaine, and returned to England on 26 April 1374; he was back at the Savoy on 1 May, and stayed there until the middle of July." Chastened and humiliated by the failure of his great *chevauchie*, and castigated for it by both his father the King" and the public at large, he would spend the next year in the political wilderness, taking little part in public affairs, and doubtless making up for lost time with Katherine Swynford: it says much for the strength of their feelings for each other that their love had survived the long months of separation.

In private, however, John was preparing to take part in the new peace negotiations called for by the Pope. Increasingly, he was becoming convinced that there was no point in continuing with this ruinous war, and that peace was essential for the future prosperity of England. The following year, he would emerge as the major advocate of a peace policy, and would remain so for the rest of his life, but his views were to be at variance with those of the majority of his countrymen, who wanted victories and military glory, and regarded any overtures for peace as craven and shameful. Hence John's unpopular stance would be yet another score to be notched up against him.

Geoffrey Chaucer had returned to England from Italy on 23 May 1373. On 23 April 1374, the King rewarded him for his good service with an annual gift of a pitcher of wine for life. But it was after John of Gaunt's return to the Savoy in May that Chaucer's fortunes were markedly advanced, lending support to the theory that, although John was never his overt patron, he used his influence behind the scenes to bring Geoffrey advancement and wealth. We might credibly conjecture also that Katherine Swynford had hastened - or been summoned — to be reunited with her lover at the Savoy, and that in the heady flush of those lengthening summer days, John heeded her when she pointed out to him that, despite years of loyal and dedicated service to the Crown, during which he had performed important diplomatic missions, her brother-in-law had received little in the way

of reward. Katherine might well have heard this complaint repeated many times by her sister Philippa.

John acted immediately. On 10 May, Chaucer was given a lifetime rent-free lease on a desirable property that straddled Aldgate in London, with rooms above the gate and a cellar below. Then, on 8 June, he was appointed to the lucrative and prestigious post of Controller of Customs and Subsidies on Wool in the nearby Port of London, an extremely responsible position, given that taxes on wool exports provided England's highest peacetime revenue. Four days later, he was also appointed Controller of Petty Customs on Wines. On 13 June, John granted 'our well-loved Geoffrey Chaucer' a standard esquire's life pension of £10 (£3,414) a year, partly in recognition of the good service that his wife had rendered both to 'our very honoured lady and mother the Queen, whom God pardon, and for our very beloved companion the Queen of Castile'. And on 6 July, both Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer received overdue back payments of their annuities. It would be incredible if these grants owed nothing to the influence of Katherine Swynford. In fact, the links she and her sister forged between the illustrious House of Lancaster and the relatively humble Chaucer family were to ensure lasting benefits for the latter and rapidly propel its members up the social ladder.

Thus began what were, for Chaucer, the years of prosperity, years in which he would be busily occupied with his duties, yet would find time to write more of the great works that would bring him lasting fame, notably the dream poems, *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls*.

Another man who was rewarded for his services by John of Gaunt at this time was John Wycliffe, who received the living of Lutterworth in Leicestershire. Wycliffe was a brilliant Oxford doctor, theologian and philosopher, who had served as a chaplain to Edward III; he was a highly intelligent and sophisticated man whose radical and controversial views on the abuses and corruption within the Church would make him notorious. He disapproved of career bishops, ecclesiastics who grew wealthy on the spoils of their office and exerted too much power, and he opposed the high taxes levied on behalf of an increasingly secularised Papacy. He believed passionately that Christians should live by the rules of Christ as set down in the Gospels, and not by regulations laid down by the Church. He denied that the Pope was the true head of the Church and regarded the priesthood as superfluous. Power, he argued, should lie with the King and the chief nobles, a view John of Gaunt enthusiastically endorsed.

John likewise wished to curb the power wielded by high-ranking churchmen, and by 1371 had become Wycliffe's patron. That year, John had backed Parliament's calls to restrict public offices to laymen only. Wycliffe also believed that peace with France was essential, and may have influenced John's own views on this issue. The Duke's admiration of Wycliffe's political stance led some people to believe that he also supported the doctor's increasingly provocative opinions on the Church and its doctrines, but this would have been surprising in a man with such ultra-conservative religious views, whose actions show him to have been essentially opposed to most of Wycliffe's theological teachings.

John's willingness to champion and protect Wycliffe, and his enduring loyalty towards him, which was to provoke a backlash on his own probity and reputation, strongly suggest that he liked and respected his protege, enjoyed discussing and debating political and religious issues with him, and believed him to be sincere and much misunderstood. But according to Knighton, it was he himself who was 'deceived', and in the end, after years of defending the ever-more-controversial Wycliffe, even John would abandon him.

The Princess of Wales supported Wycliffe too; he was a familiar figure in court circles and Katherine Swynford must have known him. It is easy to imagine this intelligent woman joining in his stimulating conversations with her lover, and although of course there is no evidence that she ever did so, it is more than possible. We do not know enough about her to surmise that she was in sympathy with Wycliffe's teachings, for in every known respect she was religiously orthodox. But maybe she was swayed by her lover on the doctor's political opinions.

In July 1374, John rode north to Tutbury to see his wife and children, then in early August, he was at Leicester, perhaps with Katherine, but he was back in London by 11 September to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the Duchess Blanche's death, the first he had been able to attend — for he had been abroad every previous year — and consequently the most splendid to date.

The magnificent obit took place on 12 September. On the evening beforehand, after Vespers in St Paul's, the Duke entertained the clergy to a banquet in the cathedral that consisted entirely of sweet confections and included ginger confits, aniseed, cinnamon, a marble plate of expensive sugar bon-bons, sweetmeats and nuts, and seventeen gallons of wine in earthenware jugs.

The anniversary itself began with a procession from the Savoy to St Paul's Cathedral, which had been rendered suitably sombre with funereal black hangings brought from the Savoy. Around Blanche's partially completed tomb there burned thirty-six new wax candles in place of those that had been lit there daily, and on the tomb stood eight metal bowls containing mortar lights. Further illumination came from the torches held by twenty-four poor men who had been given gowns and hoods in the blue-and-white Lancastrian livery colours and stood encircling the tomb. In the presence of the Duke and his retinue, a senior canon, assisted by the massed cathedral clergy and choristers, celebrated High Mass at the chantry altar. Afterwards, the company returned to the Savoy for a further taste of the Duke's famous hospitality, and consumed roasted beef, lamb, goose, pork, pigeons, pullets and salted fish, some cooked with cosy spices, followed by fruit, bread and wafers, the food being washed down with sixty gallons of wine and eleven gallons of ale. The total expenses for the obit were £40 (£ 3,657).

In the years to come, Blanches anniversary would remain an important event in the Lancastrian calendar, but the Duke was not always able to attend, and the ceremonies were rarely as lavish as this one, some only costing £10 (£3,877).

Did Katherine Swynford grace the obit that took place in 1374? If the ducal children were present, she would have had a legitimate reason for being there, but there is no record of them attending; the names of only two of the guests are recorded.⁴³ Furthermore, the pattern of John's travels both before and after the anniversary suggests that his womenfolk and children were in the Midlands at the time, and it looks as if he made haste to rejoin Katherine afterwards. For as soon as all was done, John rode north to Yorkshire, reaching his castle at Tickhill before 22 September. By the 23rd, he had moved south to his manor of Gringley in Nottinghamshire, and by the 25th, he had travelled the thirty miles to Lincoln. As Kettlethorpe was on the way, it is more than likely that he spent the night of the 24th there with Katherine.⁴⁵ On the 26th, at Savenby, he ordered John de Stafford, his receiver in Lincoln, to pay a gift of twenty-five marks (£2,845) to Katherine 'for services rendered'. This indicates that, after John had ridden to London for the obit, she had travelled from Leicester to Kettlethorpe to await his coming, and rode forth with him when he left it. John had gone south to Stamford by 29 September, and was back in residence at the Savoy from October to December.

On 10 December, the Duke appointed a trusted esquire, Thomas Burton, as governor to his heir, seven-year-old Henry, who was now too old to have a governess. The boy was given not only a tutor, but also a chaplain and a keeper of his wardrobe, and sent to live in the household of Lady Wake, his former mistress. By 1376, Henry had been assigned a 'military master' to teach him the arts of war, and his sisters had been given their own chamber and wardrobe, a household within a household, with Katherine Swynford in charge of it.

At Christmas, it would appear that Katherine was with John at Eltham, where he celebrated Yuletide and New Year with the King. Since Alice Perrers was presiding over the court as unofficial queen, Edward III could hardly have complained about the presence of his son's mistress; in fact, he probably welcomed her, for he had known Katherine since her childhood, and his kindness to her at the time of her widowhood suggests that he liked her well. Her presence at court is indicated by a New Year gift from her lover: on 1 January 1375, 'with my especial grace', John granted her the lucrative wardship of the lands and heir of his late retainer, Sir Robert Deyncourt, 'and the right of the marriage of the heir for Blanche her daughter', his godchild. Sir Robert was possibly related to one of the Duke's retainers, John Deyncourt, Constable of Kenilworth Castle, whom Katherine probably knew quite well.

In fulfilling his obligations as her sponsor, the Duke intended that Blanche Swynford, who at almost twelve was nearing marriageable age, should be wed to young Robert Deyncourt. On 13 January, he gave orders to his steward, Oliver de Barton, to 'carefully guard the heir till such time that Dame Katherine will send for him, when you will deliver him and the guard of the lands to her'.⁵⁵ The wording of this warrant reveals John's respect for Katherine and his confidence in her acting autonomously. There is, however, no record of the marriage taking place, nor is there any further reference to Blanche Swynford in contemporary sources, from which we might sadly conclude that she did not live to see her wedding day. Robert Deyncourt, however, survived to press in 1387-92 for the restitution of his lands.

On 2 January 1375, John rode to Hertford Castle to visit his wife, while Katherine presumably travelled home to Kettlethorpe. At Hertford, on his arrival, John issued an order to John de Stafford to pay Katherine one mark (£114), perhaps for a wager she had won over Christmas. On the same day, he granted her the more handsome sum of fifty marks (£4,709) per annum, possibly because she was pregnant again; this allowance was also to be paid by John de

Stafford.

John had returned to the Savoy by 14 January, when he ordered de Stafford to send a tun (a large cask holding 252 gallons) of the best Gascon wine to 'our very dear and well-beloved Dame Katherine de Swynford' at Kettlethorpe; 'if none can be found, send a vat of the best wine from the Rhine that you can find'. This was a parting gift, for he was soon to go abroad again. Edward III had declared his readiness to make a truce with France, which was now a matter of necessity after Bayonne had fallen to the enemy; in February, John, who was to head the English embassy, was granted the diplomatic powers necessary to negotiate the truce, and by 9 March he was in Dover, ready to sail. John Wycliffe was in his retinue. The Duke arrived in Bruges on 24 March, and presided over the peace conference that lasted until 27 June, when a one-year truce with the French was concluded. By 15 July, he was back in England.

The summer of 1375 was very hot, with a severe drought. Katherine appears to have spent these months at Kenilworth, and it was probably at this time that she bore the Duke a second son, for in August, he ordered that two chariots of wood for fuel be delivered to Elyot, the midwife of Lincoln. Elyot is elsewhere in the *Register* referred to as a midwife of Leicester, but this grant suggests that she had moved to

Lincoln to attend Katherine Swynford in childbirth when necessary and was being suitably rewarded.

John of Gaunt's Register for 1375 has references to two other women connected with Katherine. The first was Agnes Bonsergeant, a widow, who was rewarded with a life pension of five marks (£486) for services she had performed for Katherine when she was her nurse; this was the lady who had been appointed by Queen Philippa to look after her young ward. As Professor Goodman points out, it was usual for princes to award pensions to their own nurses or those of their wives, but virtually unheard of for a royal Duke to remember the nurse of his mistress in this way, and an unmistakable indication of how deeply John had come to feel for Katherine and how important she was to him. It is also possible - with her pension being awarded at this time - that Agnes assisted at Katherine's confinement.

The *Register* also records an undated payment - which perhaps belongs to 1375 - of 66s.8d (£942) to John, son of Hawise Maudelyn,

'*damoiselle* of our very dear and beloved Dame Katherine de Swynford'.

Another grant made by John may also have marked a birth, for on 24 July, he ordered Oliver de Barton, his seneschal in Nottinghamshire, and Richard de Lancaster, park warden of his manors of Gringley and Wheatley in that county, to send to his 'beloved Dame Katherine Swynford or her attorney, sixty oaks suitable for building from any of our parks thought convenient, and which, in your judgement, will best profit her for the improvement of her houses at Kettlethorpe'. From this and the 1372 grant of oaks, it is clear that Katherine's programme of improvements was well under way, and that John's new gift was intended to further assist her in making the manor a residence fit for their children. Also during 1375, he arranged for Katherine to be paid 100 marks (£9,429), to be delivered into her own hands; this was possibly provision for their two children.

This pattern of gifts and grants had occurred before, probably in connection with the conception and birth of John Beaufort, and it was to be repeated in the future. In 1375, it perhaps marked the advent of a second Beaufort. This evidence is not conclusive, but the repetition of this pattern on each of four occasions may well point to Katherine's illicit pregnancies and the Duke's discreet arrangements for the maintenance of their expanding family.

An undated warrant in *John of Gaunt's Register* possibly belongs to the period 23 July-26 September 1375 (or perhaps 1377). and might have formed part of this provision. In it, in consideration of the good and agreeable service that she had rendered to the Duchess Blanche, John granted Katherine 'all the tenements that we own in our honour of St Botolph' - this being a manor on the east side of the River Witham in the thriving port of Boston, Lincolnshire, which had been part of the Honour of Richmond since the time of William the Conqueror. The tenements (which could have been lands, dwellings, rents or commercial premises) granted to Katherine had formerly been held by Geoffrey de Sutton, doubtless a connection of the prominent Lincoln family. Katherine was to hold these tenements and the profits from them from the Duke and his heirs for the term of her life.

Boston was a flourishing port at this date, second only to London in prosperity, and boasting fifteen merchant guilds; the beautiful parish church of St Botolph, with its famous squat tower, the 'Boston Stump', was rebuilt in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by mercantile wealth. In 1369, Edward III had established a staple for wool and

leather in Boston, and trade with the Low Countries was booming. Much of the mediaeval town has long since disappeared, but although there are no records to show where Katherine's properties were, there are clues.

All that we know for certain is that Katherine's tenements lay in the parish of St Botolph. When, in 1774, its churchyard was extended, many old houses and shops were demolished. Hers may have been among them, but there is some evidence to suggest that she owned Gisors Hall, a substantial building that survived into the nineteenth century.

In 1372, before he relinquished the earldom of Richmond, John of Gaunt had held a 'messuage' — a house with land and outbuildings — in St Botolph called 'Gisorshall'. Gisors Hall, probably built around 1245, stood in a part of town that, centuries later, would become South Square, a spacious and desirable residential area backing on to the river; the hall occupied the north-west corner plot. In 1282, it had been held of the Honour of Richmond by John de Gisors, after whom it was named. He belonged to an important merchant family that traded in Boston and London; in 1245, a John de Gisors had been Mayor of London. In 1282, Gisors Hall had been a capital messuage comprising buildings, gardens and a yard, set in two acres of land - an ideal town residence.

When, in 1810, Gisors Hall was partly demolished and rebuilt as a granary, stone fabric from the old building was incorporated in the new. A drawing that was made of the granary in 1856 shows a double-gabled stone frontage with two mediaeval mullioned windows sporting ogee arches on the upper floor, with Victorian brickwork arches surmounting them. At ground level may be seen two double-arched doorways to allow access for carts bringing grain - a nineteenth-century feature - and an old Gothic doorway at one end.

Katherine's ownership of this property is suggested by the fact that in 1427, after the death of her son, Thomas Beaufort, it was recorded that he had had a messuage called 'Gisours Hall' in Boston, with the customs and franchises thereto belonging, just as his father had had in 1372. Quite clearly, Gisors Hall was no longer a part of the Honour of Richmond in 1427, so possibly it had been alienated and sold to Geoffrey de Sutton in the 1370s, then repurchased by John of Gaunt, who granted it to Katherine Swynford, who in turn bequeathed it to Thomas Beaufort.

Katherine's familial connections with Boston were enduring. Between 1400 and 1404, her sons Thomas and Henry Beaufort were admitted to the fraternity of the town's Corpus Christi Guild, of which Edward III, Philippa of Hainault, Duke Henry of Lancaster, the Black Prince and Blanche of Lancaster had also been members. (There was also an associated guild dedicated to St Katherine; did Katherine Swynford ever pay her respects to her name-saint's image in that guild's chapel in St Botolph's Church?)

In 1500, a substantial house called Spayne's Place in Boston was recorded as being the property of Katherine's great-granddaughter, Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, the mother of Henry VII. In the fourteenth century, the de Spayne family had been prominent merchants, guildsmen and aldermen in the town, and Spain Lane is said to be named after them; however, there is no trace of Spayne's Place there, although it could have stood in Spain's Court, an opening on the south side; the ancient buildings that line the street were probably once the family's warehouses.

Given her connections with Boston, Katherine must have visited the town on several occasions, and become acquainted with its leading burghers; she possibly had mercantile interests there, and might have known or visited Spayne's Place, but there is no evidence that she owned it or that it descended from her to Margaret Beaufort; on the contrary, in 1487, it was one of the properties of the earldom of Richmond, once held by Margaret's late husband, Edmund Tudor, that were granted to her by her son the King.

Interestingly, according to an Inquisition Post Mortem of 1546, Margaret Beaufort also held Gisors Hall. Unless it had been returned to the Honour of Richmond at some stage, it might well have passed to her by descent through the Beauforts; Thomas Beaufort left no children, so his eldest brother's son, John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, Margaret's father, was his heir. In 1545, Spayne's Place was sold by Henry VIII to the Corporation of Boston. How long it survived after that is not recorded.

* *

The son probably born to Katherine in the summer of 1375 - and therefore conceived during the Duke's visit to Lincolnshire the previous September - was almost certainly Henry Beaufort, who was probably named after Henry, Duke of Lancaster. It has been suggested

that Henry was the youngest of the children that Katherine bore the Duke: in 1398, in connection with his being appointed Bishop of Lincoln, he was described as *admodum puer* - just a boy. But this was probably merely a derisory comment on his elevation to episcopal rank at the age of just twenty-three. The seventeenth-century genealogist, Francis Sandford, describes the arms of Henry Beaufort in Wanlip Church, Leicestershire, as having a crescent as a cadency mark, which in Sandford's day indicated a second son. More tellingly, Henry is second in the list of the Beauforts in the Letters Patent legitimising them in 1397.

In August 1375, John was at Leicester with Katherine, and it was probably at this time that William Ferour, the Mayor of Leicester, spent 16s. (£226) on a gift of wine for 'the Lady Katherine Swynford, mistress of the Duke of Lancaster', doubtless in the hope of securing her patronage; this payment is recorded in the civic records for the year 1375-6. This approach by the Mayor is the first evidence that her position of influence with the Duke was becoming public knowledge. It also shows that the Mayor thought an appeal to Katherine would be more successful than one to the Duchess Constance; to this extent, as Professor Goodman points out, she had usurped the Duchess's rightful place in Lancastrian affairs. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that she exploited or abused her influence. On the contrary, she seems to have avoided embroiling herself in politics, and kept very much in the background. Although there are very few known instances of her exercising any powers of patronage, the Leicester records show that she occasionally used her influence for the benefit of others, while there is evidence to suggest that if she did ask favours from the Duke, it was usually for her own family members, such as her brother-in-law, Geoffrey Chaucer, and her sister Philippa. But she was no Alice Perrers, feathering her nest at the Crown's expense: no chronicler ever accused her of such greed and rapacity, nor of the bribery and corruption that would bring Alice down.

Certainly Katherine profited materially from her relationship with John of Gaunt, but never excessively. His recorded gifts to her demonstrate his generosity, his care for her welfare and his desire to please her; they made her wealthy, but not ostentatiously so, and they were hardly lavish compared to Alice Perrers' ill-gotten gains. Nor did he abuse his political power or misappropriate public funds to indulge Katherine. In fact, she seems to have retained her autonomy as a widow and pursued her private financial and other interests when she was not with her lover, which was relatively often.

It is reasonable to suppose that Katherine accompanied John when he moved to Kenilworth later in August, and that this was only one of many visits that she made to this imposing castle, which she must have come to know well.

Kenilworth, which lies four miles north of Warwick, was to be one of the most magnificent of the castles owned by John of Gaunt, who, by 1377, had begun building a sumptuous range of apartments and lodgings there. This massive and important stronghold, built of golden sandstone, dated from the early twelfth century, and had been extended and formidably fortified by King John - who surrounded it on three sides with a defensive lake called 'the Mere' — and Henry III, whose mighty keep still stands. In 1265, the castle had fallen to the latter after a nine-month siege during the Barons' Wars, and in 1267, it had been granted to Henry's younger son, Edmund Crouchback, founder of the House of Lancaster. Since then, it had remained one of the chief Lancastrian seats, and under John of Gaunt, it was to become a luxurious palace. He built the massive Perpendicular great hall, which still survives in a ruined state, and an extensive range of private apartments and domestic offices, also now ruined.

John's great hall, or 'New Chamber', which measures 90' by 45', was accessed at one end by an external processional stair leading up from the inner court to an imposing main doorway decorated with fine stone panels and carvings, and set within a vaulted porch. The other end of the hall was graced by an oriel window; in the privacy of its embrasure, which had its own fireplace, would be set the Duke's table, where he would eat with his family and friends; Katherine must have sat at board with him here on many occasions. The rest of his household dined at trestle tables placed along the length of the hall, which was heated by two vast fireplaces of carved stone and lit by four huge traceried windows with stone seats in the alcoves beneath. Anyone sitting there reading or sewing - as Katherine might well have done — would have benefited from the natural light such windows afforded. The vast timber hammerbeam roof has long disappeared, as has the wooden floor of the hall, but much remains of the once-vaulted undercroft, which was used for storing wine and provisions. From here, a north-eastern doorway led to the three-storey service block known as the Strong Tower, which housed the kitchens, bakehouse, servants' quarters and other domestic offices.

Adjacent to the great hall at the south-western end were the Duke's apartments, accessed through the Saindowe Tower; this range overlooked the Mere. It was here that his family, knights, esquires

and, of course,

Katherine would have lodged with him. His great chamber, known as 'the White Hall', was a rectangular room located on the first floor; this was where he gave audiences and received guests, seated on a throne on a dais beneath a canopy of estate bearing the royal arms of Castile. Gaunt's Tower, a four-storeyed edifice that lay beyond the chamber block and projected over the lake, contained his private lodgings, or lesser chamber, which could be reached via a spiral staircase leading from a door in the inner court, although it must surely have been possible to access them from the great chamber. Gaunt's Tower also contained a chapel, and had garderobes on the ground and first floors. Outside was a garden, which was enclosed in September 1373, possibly to allow the Duke some privacy with his mistress, and along the causeway that now leads to a car park, there was a tiltyard.

Work on Kenilworth continued on and off until 1394, cost the Duke a princely fortune, and provided employment for numerous masons, carpenters, goldsmiths and embroiderers. In its finished state, it was the embodiment of its owner's status, splendour and authority, which was doubtless his intention, and in later years it replaced the Savoy as the showpiece of the Lancastrian inheritance. The great hall, which has been called one of the finest fourteenth-century rooms in England, is said to have inspired Richard II's remodelling of Westminster Hall in the 1390s.

In September, when John moved south to tour the West Country, Katherine returned to Kettlethorpe, and it is often erroneously claimed that she used her influence at this time to get the Fosdyke cleared. This, the oldest canal in England, had been constructed by the Romans around AD 120, to link the River Trent at Torksey to the River Witham at Lincoln, eleven miles away, and during the Middle Ages it had become a major waterway for the transport of wool from Nottingham, Hull, York and other places. But for thirty years now it had been silted up, and it was claimed that £1,000 (£282,562) had been lost in trade as a result. During the Michaelmas law term of 1375, a Lincoln jury had made representations about this, pointing out that local landowners such as 'the Lady Katherine de Swynford', whose manors and lordships abutted the Fosdyke, 'ought and were wont to clean, empty and repair' their own stretches of the dyke, according to an ancient rota; but clearly they had long since ceased to perform their responsibilities in this respect. The protest fell on deaf ears. On 15 May 1376, a commission of oyer and terminer was appointed at Westminster 'on complaint by the citizens of Lincoln . . .

that the dyke is now obstructed partly by riparian [i.e. riverside] owners [Katherine Swynford being one of them] who have meadows and pastures on both sides of the dyke, taking across their cattle in summer to pasture, and also by grass growing therein in unusual quantities'. Far from agitating to have the canal cleared, Katherine and other landowners were taking advantage of it being silted up. Yet despite parliamentary intervention, nothing appears to have been done, for in 1384, another commission headed by John of Gaunt himself was appointed to solve the problem, but even he was not entirely successful, for efforts were still being made to have the Fossdyke cleared in 1518, and the problem was only finally solved by an Act of Parliament passed in 1670.

By the end of September, John had returned to the Savoy to prepare for yet another round of peace negotiations in Bruges. Having arranged for his three-year-old daughter Catalina to have her own chamber at Melbourne Castle, where she would be looked after by a Castilian lady called Juana Martyns, he departed with Constance for Bruges at the end of October 1375. Katherine was probably still at Kettlethorpe at this time.

John apparently took Constance with him because she was expecting his child; no doubt he relished the prospect of her bearing a son and heir to Castile while the eyes of all Europe were on Bruges. Prior to her confinement, the Duchess went on pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint-Adrien de Grammont, but the boy she bore late in the year at Ghent - another John of Gaunt - appears to have been sickly, and died young, possibly in November 1376. Constance would hardly have travelled abroad at full term, so her baby was probably born several weeks after her arrival in Flanders, in early December. In that case, she must have fallen pregnant just before John left for Bruges in early March.

Constance would not conceive again for nearly ten years, when there would be compelling political reasons to produce a son. Comparing this dismal record with that of Blanche of Lancaster, who bore seven children in nine years, and Katherine Swynford, who had at least four in the same time-span, it can only be concluded that conjugal relations between the Duke and Duchess were now either very infrequent or had ceased entirely, probably because of John's passion for Katherine Swynford and Constance's own antipathy. She seems to have been more preoccupied with her Castilian ambitions than with her husband, and she could not hope to compete with the other woman in his life, whose influence was so all-embracing.

John remained in negotiation at Bruges until at least 20 January 1376, then made a brief visit back to England before returning to the peace conference for the conclusion on 1 March of a new truce, which would prolong the first until April 1377 and bring hostilities to a halt. The lavish ostentation, 'rioting, revelling and dancing' — all funded by public money - that attended John's embassy attracted much criticism from the chroniclers, who suspected that he was only advocating peace in order to enrich himself. The Duke and Duchess sailed home at the end of March, and on 23 April John was at Westminster for the annual feast of the Knights of the Garter that Edward III hosted to mark St George's Day. Five days later, what was to become known as the 'Good' Parliament met at Westminster, summoned because the King was in desperate need of money, and John of Gaunt found himself facing one of the worst crises of his career.

'His Unspeakable Concubine'

John of Gaunt was now the most hated and feared man in England. 'Oh, unhappy and unfortunate Duke!' fulminated Walsingham in 1376. 'Oh! Those whom you should lead in war you betray by your treachery and cowardice, and those whom you should lead in peace by the example of good works you lead astray, dragging them to ruin!' People of all ranks were suspicious and envious of the Duke's vast wealth and power, his incomprehensible — to the insular English — foreign ambitions, and the trappings of sovereignty that underlined his kingly rank; churchmen abhorred his anti-clerical stance and his patronage of John Wycliffe; his perceived military failures, his staunch advocacy of a peace policy, and the recent truce he had negotiated outraged all those who felt that the English should be winning great victories over the French, as in the glory days of Edward III and the Black Prince; and the common people, long burdened by the crippling taxes levied to pay for no more than a series of humiliating losses in the war with France, blamed John for England's misfortunes. This mounting resentment had been building for some time, and was now about to explode.

No Parliament had been called since November 1373, and such was the importance of this new session that the desperately sick Black Prince had himself carried to Westminster for it. Meanwhile, the City was loudly resonating with 'a great murmur of the people', and soon it became clear that the Commons were bent upon challenging the authority of the Crown itself, and that their chief targets were the corrupt influences about the King, foremost among them Alice Perrers, who were 'neither loyal nor profitable to the kingdom'. This unprecedented attack was to appear dangerously radical to the politically conservative Duke, and his honourable but ill-judged attempts to protect his father's interests were further to undermine his standing in the land.

Edward III was too infirm to attend Parliament. Thus it was that in May, the Commons dared to confront a 'very ill-at-ease' John of Gaunt in the House of Lords.' They accused the government - and, by implication, John himself - of profiteering from the war, wasting public money and corrupt practices. The King, they insisted, must 'live

off his own' in future, and not burden his people with heavy taxes. John of Gaunt was inwardly infuriated by the insolence of these 'degenerate hedge-knights of tallow', as he put it.

'Do they think they are kings or princes of this realm?' he raged in private. 'Whence have they got their pride and arrogance? Have they forgotten how powerful I am? I will give them such a fright that they shall not provoke me again.' But such was the strength of parliamentary fervour that he had no choice other than to back down and graciously agree to an inquiry into the royal administration, along with the impeachment of allegedly corrupt courtiers and the banishment of Alice Perrers from court for having fleeced the King of up to £3,000 (£806,547) a year to his great damage. Never before had a royal mistress suffered such public castigation. John saw this as an attack on monarchical authority itself, and his overriding priority was to crush it, but his transparent efforts to forestall these proceedings, and his highhanded attitude towards his adversaries, only served to antagonise them further.

John was certainly in touch with Katherine Swynford during this tumultuous time; she had perhaps joined him at the Savoy after his return from Bruges, and she probably conceived another child during that spring. Preoccupied though he was with the tortuous affairs of Parliament, John yet found time, on 15 May, to appoint a commission to address the matter of the draining of the Fosseway. His aim may have been to mollify the citizens of Lincoln, while at the same time protecting Katherine's own interests.

The Black Prince had had himself carried into Parliament, but he had fainted several times and been forced to withdraw to his sickbed at Kennington Palace. Claims that he supported the Commons derive mainly from the over-imaginative Walsingham and have been greatly overstated: he was far too ill to play any political role, and his overriding concern was to safeguard the rights of his nine-year-old son, Richard of Bordeaux. For six years now, the Prince had suffered the most debilitating and humiliating illness, with a recurrent 'flux, both of seed and blood, which two infirmities made him so feeble that his servants took him very often for dead'. On 7 June 1376, aware that he was dying, he made his will, and his father, his wife and his brothers gathered around his bed 'amid great lamentations. No one there could keep from tears', and there was 'great desolation at the sorrow of the King taking leave of his son forever'. The Black Prince died the following day, Trinity Sunday, leaving young Richard of Bordeaux as the heir to the English throne. The Prince was later

buried in a magnificent tomb executed by Henry Yevele in Canterbury Cathedral.

The Black Prince's death left John of Gaunt as the ailing Edward III's chief counsellor and hence the most powerful man in the land. 'The King no longer wished to be guided through his lords assembled in Parliament, and so he had recourse to his son, John of Gaunt, to guide himself and the realm. Until the death of the King, the Duke acted as governor and ruler of the kingdom.' The general feeling was that John was too powerful, while some feared that he had sinister designs on the Crown itself. Walsingham claims that during the Good Parliament, John demanded that the French Salic Law, which barred women from succeeding, or transmitting a claim, to the throne, be introduced into England. This would effectively have removed from the succession the heirs of his elder brother Lionel, who had left one daughter, Philippa, now the wife of Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, by whom she had four children. The implication was that John wanted to be acknowledged heir presumptive after Richard of Bordeaux. For Walsingham, that was a step too near the throne, and therefore suspect, and he tells us that the Commons rejected the Duke's petition, much to the triumphant glee of the Earl of March. But this episode may just be one of Walsingham's imaginative calumnies, for it is not referred to in other chronicles. However, Parliament did take the precautions of having Richard brought before it and acknowledged as heir apparent, and of appointing a council of peers to ensure good government, designating several of their number to attend upon the Prince and protect him from his dangerous uncle.

Sadly for the Duke's reputation, it is Walsingham's so-called 'Scandalous Chronicle' (his *Chronicon Angliae*) that records most of the events of this time. It is hopelessly biased. The waspish and vituperative Walsingham, incensed at, and deeply suspicious of, John's patronage of the increasingly outspoken anti-clerical Wycliffe, went out of his way to record — and doubtless embroider — every evil bruit he had heard concerning the Duke. He asserted that John was a traitor to his country and his House, guilty of underhand intrigue, bribery and murder; that he was a wicked uncle, intriguing to assassinate Prince Richard, or plotting with the French King to have the boy declared a bastard; that his military campaigns had failed because of his cowardice and corruption; that he led an immoral life — the only accusation founded on fact — and had treated his first wife shamefully. But if Walsingham knew that the Duke had a mistress, he clearly did not at this time know her name, for if he had he would surely have mentioned it. He resurrected the old calumny that, back in 1362, John

had had Blanche's sister, Matilda of Lancaster, poisoned so that he could claim her inheritance. No accusation was too vile or far-fetched to be levelled at the hapless Duke, and Walsingham was to continue this relentless campaign of character assassination until 1388. The sad thing was that many people were prepared to believe his allegations, with the consequence that John of Gaunt became the scapegoat for all the evils and insecurities that were plaguing the realm.

There is absolutely no evidence that John had sinister designs on the throne. He had given his oath to his dying brother loyally to serve Richard of Bordeaux, and he was always to honour it. He could indeed have challenged Richard's legitimacy, given Joan of Kent's chequered matrimonial history, but to his credit, he made no attempt to do so. Nor would the Black Prince have made his 'very dear and well-beloved brother of Spain' his chief executor had he believed that his son had anything to fear from John: this appointment, like so much else, bespeaks a deep respect and trust between the brothers.

There appears to have been a keen mutual regard between John and his widowed sister-in-law and cousin, Joan of Kent - which there surely would not have been had the shrewd Princess for a moment entertained any suspicions of John's intentions. The welfare of the young heir was a matter of importance to them both: John clearly felt a strong sense of responsibility towards Richard, for he had sworn to protect him, and he had an affection for the boy as his revered brother's son. An interest in Wycliffe's teachings was another common bond with the Princess. Soon after the Black Prince's death, John saw to it that Joan's dower rights were confirmed, ensuring her financial security, while she, on her part, was to prove warmly supportive of him in the months to come. Lavish New Year's gifts to her are recorded in *John of Gaunt's Register*.

On 10 July, Parliament had the temerity to refuse the Crown's request for funds, and in retaliation, an angry Edward III had it dissolved that same day. Now, however, he 'wholly laid down the government of the kingdom and put it in the hands of the Duke, allowing him to do all he wanted'. John of Gaunt became effectively the uncrowned ruler of England, and before the month was out, his overriding influence would be made manifest, as he firmly asserted his authority and began steadily reversing and undoing all the work that Parliament had done, high-handedly reinforcing the supremacy of the Crown and making many enemies in the process, yet at the same time establishing himself as the supreme champion and defender of royal power.

John then rode north to Pontefract Castle in Yorkshire, probably with Katherine in his train, and it was there, on 25 July, that he granted her the wardship and marriage of the heiress of Bertram de Sauneby, in recognition of the 'good and agreeable' service she had rendered, and continued to render, 'to our dear daughters'." Again, this grant may mark a new pregnancy." When John returned to London in the early autumn, 'he permitted the King to receive back into grace many who had been perpetually banished from his presence': the courtiers displaced by Parliament were pardoned and restored to their former places, while Alice Perrers hastened back to the side of a grateful Edward III. On 7 October, the ailing King made his will and named John of Gaunt as his chief executor.

Nine councillors were dismissed. William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and founder of Winchester School and New College, Oxford, had been active in leading the clerical opposition to the Crown in Parliament, and was to prove a lifelong enemy of John Wycliffe. Wykeham had been dismissed as Chancellor in 1371, but recalled by the Good Parliament. He typified the career churchmen so detested by Wycliffe, while John of Gaunt was determined to target the wealth of the Church, which enjoyed immunity from taxation, and was incensed that Wykeham had supported Parliament to the detriment of the King. Thus it may have been the Duke who prompted Wycliffe to preach against Wykeham in London. But the new Bishop of London, William Courtenay, a young aristocrat of great ability and energy, was a supporter of Wykeham, and deplored John's perceived anti-clericalism, while the Londoners themselves had their own grievances against the Duke: they resented his interference in the City, believing that he cherished 'an ancient hatred' against their jealously guarded liberties. In actuality, John was keen to protect the interests of struggling artisans and small craftsmen in the face of the financial might and monopolies wielded by the wealthy merchants and trade guilds.

In October, still relentlessly moving against his enemies, the Duke accused William of Wykeham of misappropriating public funds, and presided over the judicial proceedings taken against him; on 17 November, Wykeham was stripped of his temporalities and banished from court. It was perhaps around this time that the Duke's infant son by Constance died, a tragedy that must have hit John hard.

That same month, Walsingham claims, John attempted to chasten the Earl of March by ordering him to Calais, but the Earl refused to go, so he was forced to resign his office of Marshal of England, which was

assigned by John of Gaunt on 1 December to his cousin Henry, Lord Percy, one of the foremost northern barons, in a successful attempt to buy the latter's loyalty. What is more likely is that March resigned the marshalship because he was needed in Ireland. However, Peter de la Mare, Speaker of the Commons during the Good Parliament, *was* a target of the Duke's wrath: he was sent to prison. In January, Adam Houghton, Bishop of St David's, a friend of the Duke, and of his first wife, Blanche, was appointed Chancellor of England. In his prologue to *Piers Plowman*, William Langland refers scathingly to the 'rout of rats' by 'a cat of the court' - John of Gaunt — who... came where he liked And leapt over them lightly, and caught them at his will, And played with them perilously, and pushed them about.

Meanwhile, on 20 November, in belated response to the urgings of the Commons in the Good Parliament, Richard of Bordeaux had been created Prince of Wales. On Christmas Day, the King hosted a great feast in Westminster Hall, at which all the peers, led by John of Gaunt, knelt in turn and solemnly swore allegiance to Richard as the heir to the throne; then the boy was placed next to his grandfather at table, above the Duke and the King's other children. This was a tactical move, no doubt orchestrated by John himself, to demonstrate that he was no threat to Richard but loyally supported him as heir to the throne. On 25 January, further underlining his commitment, John of Gaunt and his brothers attended a great open-air entertainment put on by the Londoners for the Prince, with mummers in fantastic costumes parading by torchlight, and prizes to delight a young boy.

It was during that turbulent year of 1376-7 that Katherine Swynford received her first recorded payment, of £50 (£13,442), for the wardrobe and chamber expenses of Philippa of Lancaster. The Duke also arranged for her to be paid £100 (£28,885) a year in equal portions, at Easter and Michaelmas, to meet these expenses, for which she was to issue letters of acquittance under her seal — which sadly does not survive. This grant suggests that she was caring for her charges throughout the tumultuous period of the Good Parliament and its aftermath; Elizabeth, as the younger daughter, would have shared her sister's chamber. The Duke ordered these payments to be made to William Oke, the clerk of his Great Wardrobe, so perhaps both governess and charges were in residence at the Savoy for much of the period. John's readiness to entrust such large sums to Katherine demonstrates his confidence in her integrity and her financial acumen.

The closeness and family solidarity increasingly and enduringly demonstrated between the Lancastrian children, the Swynfords, the

Beauforts and the Chaucers suggests they had all known each other from childhood, so it is quite likely that Katherine had her own children with her when she was acting as governess to the princesses, and that the Chaucer children were in evidence too, in Constance's household with their mother. It is not beyond the bounds of probability that Katherine's royal charges sometimes came to stay with her at Kettlethorpe, just as they sojourned from time to time in other households. These arrangements meant that all the children grew up in an environment in which learning, literature, poetry, religion, the arts and intellectual debate were strong elements, and that they would have absorbed those influences from their infancy, even the girls being encouraged to participate, for John of Gaunt was the most enlightened of mediaeval men in that respect, and Katherine was herself a cultivated and intelligent woman. Furthermore, it is obvious that John's legitimate children were fond of Katherine, and readily accepted her children by their father as their half-siblings, even embracing her Swynford children within the family circle.

The effects of such an upbringing are apparent in the success that all these children were to achieve in later life. That success, and the establishing of close and harmonious relationships within what could have been a highly dysfunctional family, must largely be a tribute not only to John of Gaunt's forceful character and influence, but also to Katherine's tact, humanity and obvious gift for getting the best out of people.

All the evidence suggests that Katherine and John were good and caring parents, whose children grew up to love and respect them. Judging by the gifts that attended their arrival, the births of the Beauforts were welcomed by the Duke, who must have seen them as a means of extending his affinity and influence. But there was more to it than that. John, whose devotion to his offspring by Katherine was commented upon by Froissart, was to prove diligent in securing for them a place in society that befitted their noble birth, and in promoting their interests, whilst cautiously ensuring that these did not infringe upon the rights of his legitimate heirs, a policy that would have pre-empted any jealousy on the part of the latter. As for Katherine, 'she loved the Duke of Lancaster and the children she had with him, and she showed it'.

In 1376, probably at the intercession of John of Gaunt, the Pope granted permission (an 'indult') for 'Catherine de Swynford', in the diocese of Lincoln, to have a portable altar in her lodgings, which is surely further testimony to her piety, although we might wonder if the

Pontiff was aware of her adulterous relationship with the Duke, or if her conscience was ever troubled by it. Could she have gone to confession, knowing she was committing a sin in the eyes of the Church every time she slept with him? Or did she confess these transgressions, sincerely intending each time not to commit them again, but failing miserably? We have no way of knowing.

Katherine's disappearance from the records during the turbulent latter months of 1376 was probably occasioned by advancing pregnancy: it is likely that she bore her third child by John in the early months of 1377. This was a dramatic and highly publicised period in the Duke's life, but nowhere is there any mention in the chronicles of Katherine, who may well have been in seclusion at Kettlethorpe or elsewhere at this time. It might be significant that, on 25 February, Edward III licensed John to grant to Katherine for her lifetime the ducal manors of Gringley and Wheatley in Nottinghamshire, which were jointly worth more than £150 (£52,428) per annum; this grant perhaps marked the birth of a third child, and the rents from these manors were possibly intended to provide for its upbringing, as might have been the profits from the Sauneby wardship, granted by John the previous July when the pregnancy would have been confirmed. The Duke also presented Katherine with a tun of wine at this time. Armitage-Smith opines that it was Thomas Beaufort who was born early in 1377, but this third child was probably Katherine's only daughter by John, Joan Beaufort, perhaps named in honour of the Dowager Princess of Wales, who was demonstrating such kindness and friendship to the Duke at this critical time. The usual date given for Joan's birth is 1379, but that would mean that she was barely fourteen when her first child was born around 1393, and the pattern of grants is not repeated in 1379. An earlier birth date of 1377 is probably more realistic.

Joan may have been born at Kettlethorpe, but given the political situation at this time, her birth perhaps took place elsewhere. For John of Gaunt was so hated in the country that anyone connected with him was at risk — as would be proved dramatically in February 1377 — and Katherine, as his mistress, was especially vulnerable. Professor Goodman, who places Joan's date of birth in 1379 with reservations, has suggested that she was delivered at Pleshy in Essex, the residence of Joan FitzAlan, Dowager Countess of Hereford, Essex and Northampton. The Countess was the daughter of Eleanor of Lancaster, a sister of Duke Henry, and she, like her late husband, Humphrey de Bohun (pronounced Boon), enjoyed an enduring friendship with John of Gaunt. Her elder daughter Eleanor had just

married Thomas of Woodstock, John's youngest brother, who would be created Earl of Buckingham on 16 July 1377. Given the fact that the latest Beaufort was christened Joan, and was later welcomed into the household of the Countess's younger daughter Mary, it is indeed possible that she was born at Pleshey Castle near Chelmsford, and that the Countess acted as her sponsor.

The King confirmed the grant of Gringley and Wheatley at Sheen on 4 March 1377. The acquisition of these two manors, both situated not far from Kettlethorpe, added considerably to Katherine's income; she was by now a fairly wealthy woman.

Gringley-on-the-Hill is a pretty village perched eighty-two feet above sea level, twelve miles to the north-west of Kettlethorpe, and boasts beautiful views over Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and a church with a Norman arch, dedicated to St Peter and St Paul. To the east is Beacon Hill, the site of the original Saxon settlement. The mediaeval manor had been granted to John of Gaunt by Edward III, and between 1372 and 1377, John had kept the manor house and its chambers in repair. There was good hunting to be had nearby: in his *Register*, the Duke refers to 'the West Park' and 'our parks of Gringley'. Katherine surely would have visited, and stayed at, this desirable property.

Wheatley, which is mentioned in Domesday Book and was granted to John of Gaunt by Edward III, is now two villages, North and South Wheatley, but in Katherine's time it was a manor set in woodland, and famous for the strawberries that grew there. It is situated three miles south of Gringley and nine miles north-west of Kettlethorpe.

At some unspecified date, possibly in 1377, Katherine was also granted the manors of Waddington and Wellingore in Lincolnshire. The entry in *John of Gaunt's Register* (which is erroneously dated 1354, at the Savoy) states that these properties were bestowed on her in reward 'for the good and loving service which Lady Katherine Swynford has rendered to our late dearly beloved Duchess'.

Waddington lies about five miles south of Lincoln, and had formed part of the Lancastrian inheritance. Wellingore is five miles further south, and ten miles east of Newark on the Lincoln road. Originally a Saxon settlement and Domesday village, it occupies a magnificent position on the Lincolnshire Cliff, with the old village built of light brown stone lying to the west, where the escarpment rises 260 feet

above sea level; below is the valley of the River Witham. Apart from the heavily restored twelfth-century church, the ruined stone cross by the old main road is the only surviving mediaeval structure; the Manor House to the north, and Wellingore Hall, set in extensive parkland to the south, both date from the eighteenth century.

Katherine was at Nottingham, or had business there, some time during

1377, for her seal was used there by John, son of Walter de Dunham, in witness of a document. John de Dunham was a prominent merchant and burgess of Bishop's (later King's) Lynn in Norfolk; he owned at least one shop there in the 1370s, and served as one of the town's chamberlains in 1377-8. His father, Walter, had held the same office in 1340-1. The Dunham family was spread all over East Anglia and the East Midlands, while an earlier John de Dunham's will had been dated at Lincoln in 1346. Katherine's links with the family probably arose through trading connections, for at some point she too owned a house in King's Lynn (see Chapter 10), while Dunham's use of her seal suggests a degree of friendship between them.

Katherine's fortunes may have been in the ascendant in 1377, but John of Gaunt's were under serious threat. His reversal of the decisions of the Good Parliament had made him even more hated and feared than before. It was probably around this time that his daughter Philippa's former nurse, a lady known only as Maud, wrote warning him that five friars of Canterbury 'have wickedly and treacherously spoken of you, my very redoubtable lord'. She beseeched him to protect himself well from them and all others, in God's name'. Did Katherine tremble for her lover when she heard of such things?

Parliament had reassembled on 27 January, with Prince Richard and John of Gaunt presiding. It has often been said that it was packed with John's supporters, but the evidence does not bear this out.³⁵ Nevertheless, due to the Duke's influence, much of the legislation of the Good Parliament was formally reversed.

By this time, disturbing rumours that John of Gaunt was a changeling were causing 'great noise and great clamour' in London and the rest of the kingdom. They appear to have been spread by the banished William of Wykeham (although he was to deny that) and/or his supporters in a bid to topple the Duke from power. It was asserted that in 1340, Queen Philippa had actually given birth to a daughter, but had overlaid and suffocated her. Fearful of confessing this to King Edward, she had substituted the little corpse for a living baby boy, the

son of a Ghent labourer, butcher or porter (there are various versions of the story), this infant having been smuggled into St Bavon's Abbey where the Queen had been confined; she named him John and brought him up as her own. Philippa was said to have admitted this in confession to William of Wykeham on her deathbed in 1369, insisting that, should there ever arise any prospect of John succeeding to the throne, the Bishop must break the seal of the confessional and publicly reveal the truth, 'lest a false heir should inherit England'.

For all its propaganda value, there are inherent flaws in this story. First, there was a strong family resemblance between Edward III and John of Gaunt, who had typically Plantagenet features. And second, Queen Philippa had been a lady of great integrity, unlikely to have contemplated such a deception; nor is there any evidence that Edward III was so fearsome a husband that she could not have told him of the tragedy that had occurred; on the contrary, theirs was an affectionate union, and he both loved and indulged her. Finally, had there been any substance in the story, surely the Bishop would have openly proclaimed the truth, rather than stooping to spread scurrilous unsubstantiated rumours. Unsurprisingly, few believed the tale, although there were those who were ready to use it as a weapon against the Duke. The rumours angered John himself, and doubtless hurt him, for he had cherished a high regard for his mother, but he did not stoop to contradict them. It would have been beneath his dignity to do so.

On 2 February, Convocation — the assembly of bishops — met, and demanded that William of Wykeham be present among them. Bishop Courtenay now seized his opportunity to move against Wycliffe, who had openly preached against Wykeham; he was determined to silence Wycliffe's subversive views on the Church and its wealth, and summoned Wycliffe to appear before him to answer a charge of heresy. John of Gaunt rightly saw in this an attempt to disparage himself too, for he shared those views, and he resolved publicly to champion Wycliffe's cause and discredit the bishops who had opposed him. He began by appointing four doctors of theology to undertake Wycliffe's defence.

The nineteenth of February was the day appointed for the trial of John Wycliffe. John of Gaunt and Henry, Lord Percy, backed by a band of heavily armed retainers, 'stood shoulder to shoulder' with the reformer as he arrived at St Paul's Cathedral, and forced a path through the large crowds of Londoners that had gathered there, Percy brandishing his staff of office and jostling the people aside. Bishop Courtenay was

angered by the presence of the Duke and the Marshal, and a sharp quarrel erupted, with the Bishop castigating Percy for manhandling his flock, whereupon the Duke retorted that Percy would conduct himself as befitted the Marshal whether Courtenay liked it or not. This incensed both Bishop and people, who chose to interpret John's words as a further threat to the City's jealously guarded liberties, and the atmosphere grew dangerously heated.

Once the tribunal had assembled in the Lady Chapel, further harsh words were exchanged. Percy showed Wycliffe to a seat, but the Bishop ordered him to remain on his feet throughout the proceedings, at which John of Gaunt uncharacteristically lost his temper.

'Lord Percy's motion is but reasonable,' he insisted, 'and as for you, my lord Bishop, who are grown so proud and arrogant, I will bring down the pride, not of you alone, but of all the prelacy in England.'

Courtenay told him to do his worst, provoking the stern warning that Courtenay need not think that his aristocratic relations would protect him from the day's repercussions, for they would be hard put to it to look to themselves. The Bishop replied that he would trust in God, not in his relatives. Angered by the Duke's threats, the people began loudly to heckle him. He warned them he would have them arrested if they persisted, but Courtenay threatened to excommunicate him if he dared to do so in his cathedral. Whereupon the Duke muttered, 'Rather than endure this, I should take him by the hair and drag him out of the church.' It was probably said in the heat of the moment, but John's arrogance and his apparent determination to ride roughshod over the privileges of the Londoners were to prove his downfall. Incensed by his treatment of their Bishop, and inflamed by a rumour that he intended to deprive them of their elected Mayor and replace him with the Marshal, the citizens exploded in anger, and the proceedings collapsed in chaos, with Wycliffe being hustled away by the Duke and Percy, and escaping ecclesiastical censure for the time being. Nevertheless, he was now a marked man, irrevocably alienated from the hierarchy of the Church. As for John of Gaunt, far from directing the opprobrium of the Londoners towards the bishops, as he had intended, he had succeeded in turning it upon himself.

Percy now made matters worse by usurping the powers of a magistrate and imprisoning a London man in his official residence as Marshal, which was seen as an even more outrageous attack on the City's liberties. The next day, a rioting mob of Londoners rescued the prisoner and sacked Percy's house. Then they made for the Savoy in a murderous mood, bent on assassination. On the way, they lynched a

man who spoke up for John of Gaunt, and in Cheapside, some insultingly hung the Duke's coat of arms upside down, as if he were a traitor. And they would have fired the palace itself, had not Bishop Courtenay arrived and ordered them to desist. Fortunately, the Duke and Percy were not there, but dining on oysters in Thames Street at the house of Sir John d'Ypres, a wealthy Flemish merchant who was an old friend of John of Gaunt's and stood high in the favour of the King. Warned by one of his knights that 'infinite numbers of armed men' were out for his blood, and that 'unless he took great heed, that day would be his last', John leapt up so hastily from the table that he painfully crashed the backs of his legs against the wooden bench. His host offered him wine, 'but he could not drink for haste'. He and Percy fled through a back gate, commandeered a boat across the Thames and 'never stayed rowing' until they reached Kennington, where the Princess Joan was persuaded to act as mediator in the hope of calming the situation. She sent three of her knights to check the citizens, and because of the affection in which she was held, the mob gradually dispersed.

The next day, when tempers had cooled, a deputation of Londoners went to Sheen to beg the King's forgiveness for the rioting, but insisted that John of Gaunt was to blame for all their troubles. Edward III promised he would uphold the City's liberties, and to mark his golden jubilee, he would later issue a general pardon. The only person exempted from it was Wykeham — in which the hand of John of Gaunt may clearly be perceived. In the end, the Mayor and his brethren had to get to their knees, beg the Duke's forgiveness, and agree to his demand that they set up a marble pillar bearing the arms of Lancaster in Cheapside. Parliament was dissolved the next day, and the political life of the nation began to recover its equilibrium.

That Edward III approved of the Duke's recent actions is suggested by the lifetime grant he made him on 28 February of palatinate powers in the Duchy of Lancaster. This meant that John would enjoy virtually regal authority within those lands, and that the officers of the Crown could not trespass upon them. Lancaster was one of only three palatinates in England,⁴ and had first been elevated to that status in 1351 for Duke Henry. The grant underlined John's pre-eminence among the nobility of England. On 5 and 6 March, royal commands were issued on the basis of information supplied by him, and that same month, John had Wykeham's temporalities granted to Richard of Bordeaux, thus cleverly affirming his loyalty to the Prince and pre-empting any protests by his enemies. Edward III would have appreciated that, through the efforts of John of Gaunt, and at much

cost to the latter, the royal authority had been largely restored, and that Richard would be the main beneficiary.

It is unlikely that Katherine Swynford had been in London to support her lover during these difficult weeks. She had probably just emerged from childbirth, and the capital would have been a dangerous place for her, given her connection with the most hated man in England. Probably she had remained at Kettlethorpe, and would not rejoin John until the crisis had well and truly passed.

John spent Easter at Hertford, probably with Constance. He was gathering a fleet in the Port of London, in readiness for a new naval offensive against the French. On 20 April, he was back at the Savoy. Three days later, to mark the Feast of St George, Edward III dubbed Richard of Bordeaux and Henry of Bolingbroke Knights of the Garter.⁴⁴ By the following month, ten-year-old Henry, who was shortly to assume his father's title of Earl of Derby, was in the Prince's retinue.

Preparations for the offensive against the French had escalated by the end of May, but it was soon to be cancelled. On 18 June, Edward III pardoned William of Wykeham, and restored his temporalities; Wykeham is said to have achieved this through bribing Alice Perrers. Three days later, the old King suffered a stroke; its ravages may be seen in the dragging down of the mouth of the wooden effigy made for his funeral, which was taken from a death mask, and is the earliest of its kind to survive. He died at Sheen on 21 June. Left alone with his corpse, Alice snatched the rings from its fingers and fled.

Richard of Bordeaux was now King of England, and was proclaimed Richard II on 22 June. But before that, the ten-year-old King had responded to a petition from the Londoners asking if he would intervene to end the unhappy quarrel between them and the Duke of Lancaster. Later that day, a civic deputation, fearful of reprisals on the part of the Duke, went to Sheen to lay their case in full before Richard and his uncle. This led to a second formal reconciliation between the Duke and the City of London, on 27 June, with John graciously accepting the citizens' public apology for their behaviour towards him.

The accession of Richard II was greeted with rapturous acclaim. People believed that the boy King would usher in a golden age in which England, with a new champion at the helm, would recover her fortunes in the war with France, and her international prestige. Richard was an attractive child, with golden hair, blue eyes and pink

cheeks, intelligent and well educated, and hopes were expressed that, as he grew to manhood, he would emulate his famous father. For the time being, he was to be left under the care and guidance of his mother and his tutor, Sir Simon Burley.

As the King's senior uncle, and the greatest nobleman in the realm, John of Gaunt was now the most important public figure in England, being powerfully influential with the young monarch. In fact, he was to be the dominant political player throughout Richard's reign, and the real ruler of the kingdom for several years of it. As such, he would prove a loyal subject of the King and the chief supporter and mainstay of the Crown. At the same time, he was actively pursuing his plans for an English invasion of Castile, with a view to breaking the Franco-Castilian alliance and setting himself up as de facto King of Castile. But Parliament proved reluctant to vote the necessary financial support; there were those who remained suspicious as to where the Duke's ambitions would lead him, and others who still believed that it was naked self-interest that was the real motive for his proposed enterprise.

It is possible that Katherine came up to London for Edward III's funeral, but she cannot have seen much of the Duke at this time, for he was very busy. Early in July, he claimed the right, as High Steward of England, to perform various ceremonial roles at the coming coronation. In this capacity, he presided over the Court of Claims that was set up at Westminster, which adjudicated on the allocation of ceremonial duties, and he also organised the late King's funeral, which took place on 5 July. 'To witness and hear the grief of the people, their sobs and lamentations on that day, would have rent anyone's heart.' As governess to the late monarch's granddaughters, and a respected former member of the late Queen's household, Katherine was perhaps a witness to the funeral procession; she would not have been present in Westminster Abbey, as etiquette demanded that only male mourners attend the obsequies of a king. Edward III was buried near Queen Philippa, and a fine tomb bearing an effigy of him (perhaps sculpted by Henry Yevele) was later raised to his memory.

Setting aside his grief for his father, John now proceeded to make plans for the new King's coronation, the first for fifty years. On 15 July, with a smiling John of Gaunt and Henry Percy riding before him, and the crowds unexpectedly cheering them, Richard II, clad in white to symbolise his youth and innocence, made his state entry into London, riding in procession through a packed city made festive with hangings of cloth of gold and silver, colourful pageants and free wine

running through the conduits. The next day, he was crowned at Westminster in a magnificent ceremony organised by John of Gaunt; it was, enthused an optimistic Walsingham, 'a day of joy and gladness, the long-awaited day of the renewal of peace and of the laws of the land'. As Earl of Leicester, the Duke carried Curtana, the blunted sword of mercy, in the procession, and afterwards, as Earl of Lincoln, acted as the King's carver during the coronation banquet. By then, the nine-hour ceremony had proved too much for the boy, who had had to be carried from the Abbey afterwards; superstitious folk, seeing one of his slippers fall off, took it for a bad omen.

Was Katherine a witness to some of these ceremonies? Hordes of people had descended upon London from all parts of the kingdom to watch the spectacle or take part, and John of Gaunt had summoned all his retainers. As governess to his daughters, Katherine had an official reason for being there. However, it is unlikely that she would have had a place in the Abbey itself. Only the wives of peers were admitted to watch the coronation ceremony, and that was a privilege that had been first extended only as recently as 1308, in honour of Edward II's wife, Isabella of France. If Katherine saw anything of the coronation, it was probably the procession, perhaps from a privileged position.

On 19 July, a council of twelve lords was appointed, which would serve under the nominal rule of the King. John of Gaunt and his brothers were not among them, nor was Henry Percy, although John's interests were well represented by five of his adherents.⁵⁴ John's unpopularity precluded him from ruling as regent, and there was clearly a feeling among the lords that power should be shared, although the Duke's ultimate authority was tacitly acknowledged, for the nobles went in constant fear of him on account of his 'great power, his admirable judgement and his brilliant mind'. His influence was quickly made plain, for on 20 July, the young King ratified the grants of Gringley and Wheatley to Katherine Swynford. This was the first manifestation of Richard's lasting affection and esteem for Katherine, and it attests to his desire to please his powerful uncle. On 24 July, John made Katherine a further gift of oaks for the repair of her houses at Kettlethorpe. This, as well as subsequent evidence, suggests that Katherine was in London, probably staying at the Savoy, at the time of the coronation.

The King's desire to please his uncle and Katherine Swynford may be perceived in another generous gesture. On 27 July 1377, exercising royal privilege, Richard nominated Elizabeth Chaucer, Philippa's eldest daughter, to the thirteenth-century Benedictine priory of St

Helen's in Bishopsgate, London. Around the same time, he nominated Elizabeth's cousin, Margaret Swynford, Katherine's daughter, to Barking Abbey, another Benedictine house.

Barking, originally founded in the seventh century, was one of the oldest, richest and most prestigious abbeys in the land; two twelfth-century queens, Matilda of Scotland and Matilda of Boulogne, had been educated there, and the natural daughters of Henry II and King John had ruled as abbesses. As has been noted, the Abbess of Barking had the status of a baron, and ranked foremost among the abbesses of England. Only the daughters of the rich and influential were accepted as nuns of Barking, and all had to be nominated by the King. So the admission of Katherine's daughter and her niece was an exceptional and signal favour that further demonstrates the young Richard's regard for Katherine, and almost certainly reflects the influence of John of Gaunt.⁵⁹ Yet despite the honour conferred, the surrender of her daughter to the cloistered existence of a Benedictine nun, at such a tender age, must have been hard for Katherine; at the same time, in dedicating a daughter to God, she was perhaps following a Roët family tradition and no doubt believed it would earn her, and her firstborn Margaret, grace in Heaven.

The King's patronage of the Chaucers did not stop there. On 26 March 1378, he was to confirm Edward III's 1366 grant of an annuity to Philippa Chaucer. That year, both she and Geoffrey were in receipt of substantial annuities totalling £63 (£24,464).

His state duties completed, John, realising that the euphoria surrounding the new reign would soon evaporate and that he would probably be blamed for any failure on the part of the new council to tackle the endemic problems and a fresh wave of French and Castilian attacks on the south coast, obtained leave of the King to retire to Kenilworth, and then spent the summer and early autumn of 1377 hunting in Leicestershire and assessing the defences of his castles. Katherine was probably with him. The Duke seems to have been in high good spirits, for it was supposedly at this time that, riding along the road between Bosworth and Leicester one evening, with only one servant in attendance, he saw labouring folk enjoying merry sports and dancing in a meadow at Rathby. John dismounted and enquired why they were celebrating. When told they were celebrating Meadow Mowing Day, an annual custom in those parts, he asked to join in and was made very welcome.

John was back at Westminster in time for the opening of Parliament in

October, and there, on his knees before the young King, he made a dramatic plea in defence of his role in the recent political conflicts. None of his ancestors had been traitors, he declared, but good and loyal men, so it would be strange indeed if he himself were a traitor, for he had more to lose than any other subject in the realm. Therefore, if 'any man were so bold as to charge him with treason or any dishonesty, he was ready to defend himself with his body'. At this, the Lords rose to their feet in unison, and begged him to desist from those words, since no one would wish to say such things of him, while the Commons insisted that he was free from all blame or dishonour, and that they took him for their 'principal aid, comforter and councillor'. Thus they defined the role he would fulfil in the years of the King's minority.

With the Duke publicly exonerated and vindicated, at least superficially, Parliament instituted proceedings against Alice Perrers. Charges were laid that she had unlawfully interfered in the government of the kingdom, and that she had controlled all channels of communication with the late King, even to the extent of eavesdropping through his bedcurtains on his conversations. John of Gaunt was one of the chief witnesses against her, and in his testimony revealed that he had been powerless in his attempts to curtail her activities. She was sentenced to forfeiture of her property — some of which was given to the Duke — and banishment. Her trial caused a sensation, and left the public with the impression that royal mistresses were greedy and corrupt creatures bent only on the acquisition of power and wealth, a perception that would soon rebound on Katherine Swynford.

The Duke was in Scotland for talks with the Scots in January 1378, but had returned to the Savoy by 7 February. On 4 March, he received letters of protection for himself and his retinue, in advance of a new naval campaign to crush the French and Castilian fleets.

Late in 1377, the Pope had been moved to condemn the teachings of John Wycliffe, but thanks to the protection of John of Gaunt and Joan of Kent, the reformer was allowed to stay on at Oxford and pursue his work unmolested. Undeterred by papal censure, Wycliffe now wrote a series of works challenging the Church and its teachings, and in the spring of 1378, he published a controversial treatise on the Bible, which provoked Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, to summon him before his court at Lambeth to answer for his heresy. Again, thanks to the intervention of Joan of Kent and John of Gaunt, the reformer escaped with a mild rebuke and was once more left in

peace for a time. John's loyalty to Wycliffe in the face of mounting censure was staunch: regardless of his own unpopularity and any consequences that might ensue, he kept the controversial doctor under his protection, declaring that he believed Wycliffe and his followers - who were disparagingly nicknamed Lollards, or 'mumblers' - to be 'God's saints', and 'was an invincible guardian in all their needs, for otherwise they would have fallen into the pit of destruction'.

When the invasion fleet sailed on 7 April 1378, the Duke was not with it. In his 'Scandalous Chronicle', Walsingham asserts that there was growing condemnation 'for his wicked and disgraceful behaviour because he himself put aside respect for God's dread', and alleges that John delayed his arrival at the port for months for fear of the enemy's fleet — the implication being that the Duke was guilty of cowardice. It was at that point that John first appeared in public with Katherine, this being the occasion that made their affair so notorious, and one that Walsingham did not hesitate to exploit in his prolonged and determined campaign to discredit John of Gaunt. Outraged, he claimed that, having 'deserted his military duties' and 'put aside all shame of man and fear of God, [John] let himself be seen riding around the Duchy with his unspeakable concubine, a certain Katherine Swynford, holding her bridle in public, not only in the presence of his own wife, but even with his people watching on in all the principal towns of the country'. By this, Walsingham meant 'the county', and he was probably referring to Leicestershire, where the Duke was staying in March 1378. By so brazenly flaunting his mistress, John 'made himself abominable in the eyes of God'.

Walsingham says the people were indignant and despairing at this scandalous conduct, and feared that the Almighty would soon vent His displeasure by punishing the whole kingdom for the Duke's sinfulness, and he accuses the latter of betraying the King's youthful innocence and putting him and his realm in jeopardy. Monkish chroniclers invariably wrote their accounts with a view to illustrating moral precepts and demonstrating that human failings had divine consequences; the objective study of current events and history, as we know it, was rare in mediaeval times. But Walsingham may truly be reflecting the opinions of a majority of the common people, who already blamed the Duke for so many ills, and whose views on his private life might consequently not have been as accepting or forgiving as those of the aristocracy or the court. Walsingham says that it was as a result of his blatant and unashamed appearances with Katherine, whom he refers to as 'a witch and a whore', that 'the worst curses and infamous invectives started circulating against [the Duke]'.

However, it may not have been the sexual relationship between the lovers that caused the greatest offence, for such affairs were common among kings and nobles, but the way he was unabashedly flaunting it publicly, to the injury of his virtuous wife, and - even more pertinently to the class-conscious and xenophobic English - the fact that Katherine was of comparatively lowly birth, and a foreigner. Above all, Katherine was tainted simply through being associated with the most hated man in the kingdom.

Walsingham's passage quoted above is the only description that survives of John and Katherine together;⁷ it is also the first mention of Katherine's name in any chronicle, and it is evidence that she had now become notorious. Although it is worth pointing out that no other chronicler mentions this specific public display by the lovers, Katherine was from now on to be referred to elsewhere in disparaging terms. To the monkish author of the *Anonimale Chronicle*, she was 'a she-devil and enchantress', a charge that echoed Walsingham's branding of her as a witch, and was therefore highly provocative and detrimental, and reveals just how perilous Katherine's position might have become. Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester, castigated the Duke from his pulpit for being 'an adulterer and pursuer of luxury', while Froissart, writing decades later, thought Katherine 'a woman of light character'. Even Henry Knighton, the pro-Lancastrian chronicler from Leicester, who admired John of Gaunt, clearly did not approve of his mistress: 'in his wife's household, there was a certain foreign lady, Katherine Swynford, whose relations with him were greedy suspect'. Knighton reveals that members of the Duke's household were very concerned about the effect of their master's involvement with his mistress; they, as well as he, were aware that it was his duty, as lord and master, to set a good moral example to his servants, as the Church enjoined. John himself disclosed in 1381 that he had been repeatedly warned by his clerics and his servants of the detrimental effect his relationship with Katherine was having on his reputation, but had chosen to ignore them.

Not everyone disapproved. Katherine seems to have been held in lasting affection by the Cathedral Chapter of Lincoln, and by the Mayor of Leicester, who, probably in company with a lot of people, took a pragmatic view of her dubious position. Between 1377 and 1379, he paid £3.6s.8d (1,165) for a horse and £2.0s.6d (£708) for an iron pan (probably a large cauldron), both of which were presented to Katherine in gratitude for 'expediting business touching the tenement in Stretton,⁷⁴ and for other business for which a certain lord besought of the aforesaid Katherine with good effect, and besought so

successfully that the town was pardoned the lending of silver to the King in that year'. (The Mayor seems to have had the better part of the bargain.)

In assessing Walsingham's stance on John of Gaunt's affair with Katherine Swynford, it is important to remember that he loathed and feared John for many reasons, and always seized upon every means to discredit him; he was not above exaggerating the Duke's faults, or even making things up, and in his view John was foolish, unscrupulous and 'without conscience'.

When it came to sexual matters, Walsingham was at his most inventive, claiming that the Duke's character 'was dishonoured by every kind of outrage and sin. A fornicator and adulterer, he had abandoned lawful wedlock' and deceived both of his wives. 'He not only dared to do such things secretly and privately, but also took the most shameless prostitutes to the beds of these wives, who, grief-stricken as they were, did not dare to protest.' This assertion is uncorroborated elsewhere and entirely at variance with what we know of John of Gaunt; this particular calumny surely stems solely from the chronicler's desire to discredit the champion of the heretical Wycliffe, and it can be dismissed as pure character assassination, born of moral outrage and a fevered imagination.

Learning that John had publicly flaunted his relationship with Katherine gave Walsingham further ammunition against the hated Duke. It has been claimed that his comments about Katherine were aimed primarily at John, and were not intended to cast aspersions on her character beyond the charge of immorality, yet being branded an 'unspeakable concubine' was pretty damaging to the reputation of a woman who was, after all, governess to the Lancastrian princesses. Let it not be forgotten that adultery and promiscuity were then perceived to be far more sinful in a woman than in a man, and carried a greater stigma. The fact that Katherine did not take a second husband for twenty-four years may have been a matter of personal choice — with the Duke supporting her, she had no need to, although marriage could confer a veneer of respectability upon royal mistresses — but it may also indicate that there was a shortage of suitors due to her living in open adultery with the Duke, and that her increasing notoriety lessened her chances of remarrying.

There can be little doubt that, once it became clear that his marriage to Constance had failed, and the crises of 1376-7 had passed, John and Katherine had grown reckless and ceased to exercise the same

discretion they had employed in the early years of their affair, nor that the liaison was now public knowledge. The notorious reputation and conduct of Alice Perrers had prejudiced public opinion against royal mistresses, and it would not be surprising if people viewed Katherine too as an immoral and self-seeking woman and a corrupting influence on the Duke, nor that they were incensed that the Duchess Constance should be so slighted and insulted. For if she had not been too bothered before about her husband's mistress, she had — with the affair now exposed — been forced into an impossible position that gave her just cause for complaint, and could no longer discreetly turn a blind eye to what was going on. That cannot have improved relations between her and the Duke and it appears to have led to an informal separation. Later evidence suggests that Constance felt herself to be at fault with regard to the breakdown of the marriage, and in time it was she who begged for John's forgiveness, so there seem to have been more factors at play here than his affair with Katherine, although that was probably the catalyst for the separation.

Given public sympathy for Constance, John of Gaunt's enduring reputation for lechery, as well as contemporary observations about, and responses to, his relationship with Katherine, there can be little doubt that the publicising of their affair did indeed damage his political standing in England, and ruined her reputation.

But it was certainly not Katherine who had kept John from sailing to France. On 29 April, after seeing his wife and elder daughters admitted with the Princess Joan to the confraternity of the Garter at Windsor, he was at a council meeting at Westminster, and in May, he was at the Savoy, busy commandeering the extra ships that were so urgently needed; on the 20th, he levied an aid for the knighting of his heir, Henry of Derby, and early in June, he attended another council meeting. Five days later, the invasion fleet returned to England, but when, later that month, Castilian ships threatened St Malo in Brittany, which was perilously close to home, John decided to take the offensive. On 17 June, he was appointed King's Lieutenant in France and Aquitaine, and thereafter he divided his time between Southampton and the Savoy, making preparations for his attack and waiting for a favourable wind. In July, he appointed Henry of Derby Warden of the Palatine County of Lancaster, and soon afterwards sailed for France with his navy. None of this sounds like idle dalliance with his mistress.

John spent August and September besieging St Malo, to no effect. Repulsed by the Castilians, he returned ignominiously to England in

September to face accusations of cowardice and incompetence. 'And the commons of England began to murmur against the noblemen, saying how they had done all that season but little good.' There were wild and unfounded rumours that John had appropriated for himself the taxes voted by Parliament for the war, and even that he and Wycliffe were plotting the destruction of the Church itself. It seemed that the superstitious predictions of divine retribution were being fulfilled, and that John's failure to take St Malo was God's punishment for his sins.

Between 28 May and 19 September 1378, Geoffrey Chaucer had been abroad on business in Lombardy. On 21 May, before Geoffrey left, John of Gaunt arranged for Philippa Chaucer's royal annuities to be paid by the Sheriff of Lincoln and other officials from Michaelmas 1378. From this, we may infer that Philippa had taken up residence with her sister Katherine at Kettlethorpe. But what may have begun as a temporary arrangement ended up lasting for a minimum of four years, for until 1383 at least, Philippa's royal annuities were paid to her by the Sheriff of Lincoln and other officials in Lincolnshire; furthermore, from 1381 to 1386, all customs receipts were divided between Chaucer and his wife. From this, we may infer that the Chaucers had decided they were happier living apart.

It may be that they had finally agreed that they were incompatible, yet there was possibly another woman involved, for in May 1380, there is an intriguing record of Alice Perrers' stepdaughter, Cecily Chaumpaigne, releasing Geoffrey from any action resulting from 'my rape and other causes'. Rape in the fourteenth century was not necessarily a sexual crime: although it could refer to sexual assault as well as forced intercourse, it could also mean abduction. Either way, it was a serious offence, punishable by hanging (and formerly by castration), and thus very rare.

In this case, the rape — if it was that — may have involved penetration. We know that Chaucer had a son called Lewis, who was born probably in 1381; Lewis seems to have been a very bright boy because he was admitted to Oxford University when only about nine, and it was to 'little Lewis my son' that Chaucer dedicated his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* in 1391; at that time, Lewis had reached 'the tender age of ten years'. Given the long gap between the births of Elizabeth and Thomas Chaucer and that of Lewis, it could be conjectured that Philippa was not Lewis's mother, and some historians have credibly suggested that he was Geoffrey's son by Cecily Chaumpaigne. If so, he was perhaps not the fruit of rape, but of an affair: Cecily, with the

proverbial fury of a woman scorned, may initially have pressed the rape charge in the hope of gaining some financial provision for her child. But Chaucer brought forward four eminent witnesses in his defence: the King's chamberlain and two of his household knights, as well as the Collector of Customs, Chaucer's own superior. Their testimony persuaded Cecily to drop the charge, but that there was some substance to her accusations is evident in Chaucer paying her £10 (£3,877) in compensation for her 'rape' two months later.

We can only conjecture that it was this episode that drove the Chaucers apart. What seems likely is that Geoffrey and Philippa separated on reasonably amicable terms. In the 1380s, it was he who usually went to the Exchequer twice a year to draw her annuity.⁹⁰ She remained a member of Constance's household, on very good terms with the Duke and Duchess. However, her removal to Lincolnshire, although apparently primarily for personal reasons, came at a time when her sister's relationship with the Duke had become notorious, and afforded her perhaps a welcome respite from the tensions in the Duchess's chamber.

Philippa and Katherine now had much in common: both were essentially *femmes soles*, both had dedicated a daughter to God, both were rearing sons called Thomas who were of similar age, and both were an integral part of the Lancastrian social circle, Katherine especially so. But while she was the Duke's mistress, Philippa loyally served the Duchess, and historians have conjectured that Philippa could only have looked on her sister with disapproval, and that her loyalties were painfully divided between Constance and Katherine. Yet if so, Philippa would hardly have chosen to go and live for some years with Katherine at this time and in these circumstances. It may have been a case of loving the sinner whilst deploring the sin, but her removal to Kettlethorpe perhaps reflects the need of the younger and distressed sister for the support and companionship of the elder, who had in the past demonstrated great concern for Philippa through the favours she had obtained for her and her husband. And Constance, regardless of her feelings towards Katherine Swynford, seems to have liked Philippa for her own sake; they were, after all, much of an age, and Philippa seems to have rendered excellent service to her mistress.

It may have been Geoffrey Chaucer who disapproved of Katherine, despite all the favours that her influence had procured for him. His disparaging remark about governesses with a past, and his panegyric lauding Pedro the Cruel may well reflect his opinion of his sister-in-law and his loyalty to Constance. In 'The Man of Law's Tale', the

heroine - tellingly called Constance - is a model of patience and piety who accepts 'the will of

Christ' in all the misfortunes and sufferings that are laid upon her.⁹³ This too may be a comment on the tribulations and virtues of the Duchess Constance. Certainly Katherine does not feature largely — or features barely at all — in the surviving records of Chaucer's life, and it may be that, after his separation from Philippa, he had as little to do with her as possible. His attitude towards her may have been a further source of discord between the Chaucers.

With Philippa in residence at Kettlethorpe, it would surely have been a lively household. When she was not in attendance on the Duchess, Philippa would have had her ten-year-old son with her. Thomas Swynford, probably a year older, and the young Beauforts were playmates for him. As there is no record of her marriage, we may suppose that Blanche Swynford, who would have been about fifteen in 1378, had already died, but possibly her sister Dorothy was still at home. John Beaufort was now about five, Henry possibly three and Joan not quite two. It would have been a chaotic household, with all the building works that were going on at this time, and of course the lady of the manor was often away. Katherine was probably with John when he was at Leicester Castle on 4 October, for on that day he issued letters patent permitting her to cut down oak trees at his manor of Enderby in Leicester Chase, 'and to sell or carry this wood wherever she wishes, and use the profits for her own use'.⁹⁴ It was probably used for the ongoing renovations at Kettlethorpe, which by now must have begun to look very imposing indeed; it was perhaps in this period that the great stone gateway was built. To all appearances, Katherine's was now a lordly household, reflecting the wealth and social position of its mistress.

Katherine probably went home to supervise the new works she was planning when John rode south to Gloucester, where Wycliffe was allowed to address Parliament, which assembled there in late October. That was to be Wycliffe's political swansong. The following year, 'this second Satan' would attack the sacrament of the Eucharist itself, whereupon the deeply orthodox Duke began to distance himself from his former protegee - 'he was deceived, as were many others'. In 1380, Wycliffe was ordered not to preach, and the following year his heretical views on transubstantiation were condemned by the Church. He had just completed his translation of the Bible into English, but his works were all condemned and banned in May 1382. By then, John of Gaunt had severed all connections with him, and he had retired to

Lutterworth, where he died of the effects of a stroke in 1384. His bones were exhumed and burned in 1419, under a heresy law that had not been in force in his lifetime.

Nevertheless, when Parliament, in 1395, proposed the burning of Wycliffe's Bible, John of Gaunt, with 'great oaths', spoke up in its defence. 'Other nations have God's law in their own mother tongue,' he argued, 'and we will have ours in English.'⁹⁷ In this, he was way ahead of his time — it would be another 150 years before English Bibles were chained in churches for all to read.

After spending some months at the Savoy, John of Gaunt was again at Leicester in August 1379, probably enjoying the pleasures of the chase. But he was back in London before 12 September for Blanche's obit at St Paul's, where an elaborate iron grille had been set up around her new tomb. John must have left immediately after the obit for Kettlethorpe, where, only two days later, he made a grant to Katherine.

This was probably a fleeting visit, for John was not among the witnesses to a deed dated that same day, 14 September, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and issued at Kettlethorpe in the presence of the rector, Sir Robert de Northwood; in it, John de Dovdale of Chaworth granted to Katherine and her heirs 'certain tenements he had in the town and fields of Kettlethorpe and Laughterton'. Some years later, on 25 July 1387, John de Sereby, citizen of Lincoln (who had been at her son's baptism), granted to 'Lady Katherine de Swynford, Lady of Kettlethorpe ... all his rent which he had in Kettlethorpe, Laughterton and Fenton'. By using part of her substantial income to purchase small properties and plots of land in nearby villages, Katherine was prudently extending her holdings at Kettlethorpe and Coleby, and thus conserving and improving her son's inheritance.

John was at Kenilworth from 27 October to the second week in November, doubtless to see how his extensive renovations were progressing; they were evidently causing a lot of disruption, because when the Duke came to Kenilworth for Christmas, he and his retinue had to lodge at Kenilworth Priory, where a floor was laid for dancing in the great chamber — surely an unwelcome intrusion in the monastic regime. During his sojourn at Kenilworth in the autumn, John had ordered the payment of moneys to Geoffrey Chaucer; he also, on 6 November, commanded his receiver in Lincolnshire to pay 'our dear and well-beloved *damoiselle*' Philippa Chaucer's annuity.

These orders may have been prompted by Katherine, who had perhaps accompanied her lover to Kenilworth. John was again at Kettlethorpe with Katherine from 14 to 16 November. By 17 November, he had ridden south to Newark.

It is doubtful if Katherine spent the Christmas and New Year of 1379-80 with John at Kenilworth, for he would have presided over the festivities with the Duchess Constance for form's sake, but Philippa Chaucer was almost certainly of the company, for among John's New Year gifts was a silver hanap (a cup with a lid) costing 3s.5d (£609) for her. On 2 January, a payment of 20s. (£368) was made to a messenger of Matilda de Montagu, Abbess of Barking, who had come to receive a gift for the Abbess from the Duke; it is tempting to speculate that this messenger had brought a message from Margaret Swynford for her mother, and that a part of his handsome fee was intended for the young nun. Constance had moved to Hertford by 11 January 1380, while John, who had stayed at Kenilworth, later rode south to the Savoy, where he remained until March.

John was at Windsor on 1 April for the magnificent wedding of the King's half-sister, Maud Holland, to Waleran, Count of St Pol. On the following day, he arranged for Catalina, his eight-year-old daughter by Constance, to be brought up in the household of Joan Burghersh, Lady Mohun, the widow of John, Baron Mohun, who had been a retainer of the Black Prince and had died in 1375. The child was taken to Lady Mohun on 8 June, and remained in her care until at least 1383, when the Duke paid £50 (£20,360) for her expenses. It was quite usual for children of the aristocracy to be reared in a separate establishment, it being generally felt that parents might be too soft when it came to education and discipline.

Understandably, John did not show disrespect to his wife by placing her daughter with her two half-sisters under the governance of his mistress. However, he was now effectively living apart from Constance; on 12 May, at the Savoy, he ordered his receiver in Norfolk to pay 500 marks (£65,002) annually for her wardrobe and chamber expenses at Tutbury. In March 1381, he would augment this sum by a further 200 marks (£25,420), and then increase Constance's original settlement of 1,000 marks per annum (worth £125,221 in 1381) to £1,000 (£375,662). These increases may well reflect the increasing political importance of 'his dear wife the Queen', as his hopes for the Castilian throne grew more realistic; it may also have been in part the result of the pricking of the Duke's conscience over

his adultery with Katherine Swynford.

Meanwhile, on 15 April, at Kenilworth, he had handed over £100 'to Dame Katherine Swynford, governess of our daughters, Philippa and Elizabeth of Lancaster, for the expenses of their wardrobe and chamber for the past Easter term'. As is becoming clear, references to Katherine in records dating from the late 1370s and early 1380s, although sparse, suggest that she was now a permanent fixture in the Duke's life and that of his daughters, and that he seized every opportunity to have her with him.

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John was based at the Savoy from May to July 1380. In May, the young Richard II, now thirteen, bound himself by treaty to marry Anne of Bohemia. With talk of a royal marriage in the air, John now turned his attention to finding suitable spouses for his older children. On 24 June 1380, Elizabeth of Lancaster, now a spirited young woman of seventeen, was wed to John Hastings, third Earl of Pembroke, at Kenilworth; from Elizabeth's point of view, this union was not entirely satisfactory, for her new husband was just eight years old. It is likely that Katherine Swynford, who had played an important role in Elizabeth's life, was involved in the preparations for her wedding, and was present. Afterwards, Elizabeth had her own household as Countess of Pembroke, and no longer needed Katherine's care.

Elizabeth had grown into a headstrong and extrovert girl, very different from her serious older sister. Her tomb effigy in Burford Church, Shropshire, shows a tall, slender woman with long fair hair and markedly Plantagenet features; evidently she favoured her father in looks. While she was intelligent and literate, dancing and singing were her great talents, and she so excelled at the former that she would one day be awarded a prize for being the best dancer at Richard II's court. Richard thought well of her, and in 1383 pardoned a murderer at her instigation. But although Katherine instilled in Elizabeth her own love of learning and literature, and a sense of piety that would become more evident as she grew older, time was to prove that she had not been entirely successful in her role as governess, because the example she had set in her own conduct with Elizabeth's father proved the most unsuitable role model for an impressionable girl who was driven by her own youthful passions, which marriage to a child nine years her junior could not satisfy.

It seems odd that the Duke should marry off his second daughter before his first, Philippa, who at twenty was quite old to remain unwed, but John possibly hoped to use her as a diplomatic pawn in his bid for the Castilian throne. Marrying her to one of his allies could secure invaluable political support.

With Philippa, Katherine seems to have been more successful as a mentor. John's eldest daughter had grown into an amiable, literate and pious young woman who liked to read psalms and edifying devotional texts, yet she also had the skills that befitted her to grace any European court, and was an avid participator in courtly games of love. Before 1386, the poet Eustace Deschamps composed a *ballade* entitled *Des Deux Ordres de la Feuille et de la Fleur* (Of the Two Orders of the Leaf and the Flower), in which he describes a popular May Day intellectual pastime in which courtiers declared themselves partisans of one or the other, the two symbols being regarded as either male or female. The finer details of this play have been lost in time, but Philippa, Deschamps tells us, was the chief patroness of the Order of the Flower. Unlike her sister, though, her life would never be tainted with scandal.

Philippa's tomb effigy depicts a lady with small, delicate features — did she take after her mother? - and a long, graceful neck. The sixteenth-century Portuguese genealogy in the British Library, in which Queen Constance's image (already discussed) appears, shows Philippa with reddish hair and a fuller face, although this may be a fanciful representation.

By 1380, John's hopes of winning Castile were improving. In 1379, Enrique of Trastámara had died, and been succeeded by his son, the melancholic and irresolute Juan I, another Francophile. In July 1380, John achieved notable diplomatic success when Ferdinand I, King of Portugal agreed to renew an alliance he had made with the Duke in 1372. With Ferdinand's friendship secured, John's ambitions appeared more realistic.

The Duke now sought for a bride for his heir, Henry of Derby, who was thirteen, the same age as the King. Following Edward III's policy of marrying his sons to English heiresses and thus extending their land-holdings, affinities and influence, John set his sights on Mary de Bohun, younger daughter and co-heiress of his late friend, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton. Her mother, Joan FitzAlan, was the Duke's cousin, and much liked by him. Mary was thus very well connected, being related to the House of Lancaster

through her mother, but she was also very young, only eleven or thereabouts. Eleanor, her elder sister and co-heiress, was married to Thomas of Woodstock, Earl of Buckingham, John's youngest brother, and Mary was living with them at Pleshy in Essex.

Not being content with his share of the Bohun inheritance, Thomas was determined to lay his hands on the rest, which comprised the earldoms of Hereford and Northampton, and he put relentless pressure on young Mary to give it all up and take the habit of a Poor Clare nun. But in July 1380, with the connivance of her mother and John of Gaunt, Mary's aunt, Elizabeth de Bohun, Countess of Arundel, kidnapped her from Pleshey while Thomas was away campaigning in France, and took her to Arundel Castle in Sussex. On 28 July, on payment of 5,000 marks GC475.947). John of Gaunt secured from Richard II a grant of Mary's marriage to himself, thwarting his brother's ambitions, for the grant was in part payment of large sums owing to the Duke for military expenses. A furious Thomas, says Froissart, 'never after loved the Duke as he had hitherto done', although his wrath eventually abated and the two remained outwardly friendly."³ Soon afterwards — certainly before March 1381 — Mary was married with great ceremony and rejoicings to Henry of Derby at twelfth-century Rochford Hall in Essex, her mother's home. As Philippa and Elizabeth of Lancaster were present, it is probable that Katherine Swynford was too; there is later evidence to suggest that Mary de Bohun was fond of her, and Katherine would one day become a member of her household. After the wedding ceremony, Mary remained with her mother, with the Duke paying for her maintenance; because of her youth, he and the Countess had agreed that the consummation of the marriage should be delayed until Mary was fourteen.

On 2 December 1380, whilst attending Parliament at Northampton, John of Gaunt ordered the payment of £50 (£19,384) to Katherine for Philippa of Lancaster's wardrobe and chamber expenses, and commanded that in future she be assigned £100 (£38,768) per annum for the same in equal portions at Easter and Michaelmas. Given that Philippa was now twenty, it is likely that Katherine was expected to be more of a companion and chaperone to her, rather than a governess.

Kettlethorpe was not far from Northampton; with Katherine perhaps heavily pregnant at this time, John may well have ridden over to visit her. In her condition, it is hardly likely that she was present at Leicester at Christmas, when the King, the Princess Joan and the rest

of the royal family were John's honoured guests. However, Philippa Chaucer was of the company, probably in attendance on the Duchess Constance, and at New Year, the Duke presented her with yet another silver-gilt hanap, worth £s.2s.id (£1,979)

On 20 January 1381, at Leicester Castle, John granted Katherine the wardship of the lands and heir of the late Elys de Thoresby, a member of his retinue who lived about twelve miles west of Kettlethorpe; in return, she was to perform all the services 'due and accustomed'. But the next day, a second grant of this wardship was issued, with the clause about the services omitted. Might we assume that Katherine herself had persuaded the Duke to leave it out, or that he amended it himself? The latter is more likely, for Katherine was probably not at Leicester at this time, and John probably had very good reasons for not wishing her to be burdened with feudal services. For this grant may well mark the birth of their third son and fourth child, Thomas Beaufort, who had perhaps been conceived at Kenilworth the previous April and been born probably at Kettlethorpe in January 1381. It has often been asserted that Thomas was born in 1377, since he was described as a 'young gentle-man' in February 1397, but this probably refers purely to his rank and distinguishes him from his eldest brother, who was a knight. Like his Beaufort brothers, Thomas was given a favoured Lancastrian name, probably in honour of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, John's great-uncle, who had been executed in 1322 for opposing the inept Edward II, and was now popularly - but quite unjustifiably - reputed a saint. Thomas could also have been named for John's brother, Thomas of Woodstock, perhaps to mollify him for the loss of Mary de Bohun's inheritance.

Historians have long speculated that there were perhaps other Beaufort children who did not survive infancy. The Duchess Blanche had borne seven children in nine years of marriage, and Katherine's record in the same time-span, when she was deeply involved with John and still mostly in her twenties, is only four. Possibly she suffered one or more miscarriages, stillbirths or neonatal deaths in the four years that probably lay between the births of Joan and Thomas. Such occurrences were common at all levels of mediaeval society — four of Blanche's children had died young — and it was rare for all one's offspring to survive infancy in that age of high infant mortality.

In March 1381, John again increased Constance's chamber allowance, another gesture that might have been prompted by his conscience. Gifts given by him to Katherine around this time may mark a joyful reunion and his gratitude for the birth of their son: there were two

tablets of silver and enamel costing seven marks (£877), a belt of silver costing 40s.od (£765), and a silver *chaufour*, or chafing pan, bought for 33s.4d (£626). The latter, which had three legs and a handle, and could be stood over a candle flame, was used to keep food warm at table. John had purchased, and perhaps commissioned, it from 'Herman, goldsmith of London', whom he often patronised. *John of Gaunt's Register* also lists other gifts 'to be delivered into my own hands and paid for the same day', which by their very nature must have been purchased for Katherine Swynford. These included 'a gold brooch in the form of a heart set with a diamond', again supplied by Herman the goldsmith, and 'a gold brooch set with a ruby and fashioned in the form of two hands'.

It was probably while he was at Leicester - and certainly before 31 March — that the Duke gave Blanche, his bastard daughter by Marie de St Hilaire, in marriage to Sir Thomas Morieux of Thorpe Morieux, Suffolk, who had been a knight in his retinue since 1372, and had previously served as Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk. In 1381, Sir Thomas, who was renowned for his military exploits, was appointed Constable of the Tower of London, and in 1383 he would become Master of the Horse to Richard II. Froissart says he was popular in the ducal household because of his sardonic wit. John had done well by Blanche in marrying her to such a distinguished man, and in time he would make even more impressive provision for his Beaufort bastards.

After the nuptials, John rode south to London and the Savoy, where on 3 April he hosted a magnificent feast for Cardinal Pileo de Prata and the envoys from Bohemia, who were in England to conclude the King's marriage treaty.

This was the last time that the Savoy would serve as a setting for a state occasion, for trouble was brewing in the political cauldron, which would soon boil over and engulf the lives of John and Katherine. Back in 1379, in order to meet the heavy costs of the war with France, the government, under the Duke's auspices, had imposed a poll tax, a tax on the head of every subject. At first, payment was assessed on a graduated scale, according to the means of the taxpayer — and as John of Gaunt was richer by far than anybody else, he had to have a category all of his own. But the Commons disliked this system, and in the winter of 1380-1, a new poll tax was levied, this time at a flat rate of one shilling (£19) Per head, which was unjust and unfair, for while the rich could easily afford it, many of the poor faced ruin. Already there was widespread discontent at the dismal way the war was going. The people wanted victories, but instead they were

being required to shoulder the burden of reverse after reverse. There was much anger against the government, most of it directed at John of Gaunt, who was held responsible for England's poor prowess in the war and the crippling poll tax. Tax collectors were attacked and even beheaded, there was widespread evasion and the protests became ever more vociferous. Yet on 13 March 1381, to the outrage of many, the council ruled that the poll tax must be enforced.

John of Gaunt had other preoccupations. A truce with the Scots was about to expire, and on 1 May he received a new commission to treat with them. Three days later, in the midst of his preparations for his journey north, he sent Godfrey, his barber, to Katherine with a receipt for £50 (£18,783) for some pearls he had sold to her and his daughter Philippa, which had been delivered to them by William Oke, the clerk of his great Wardrobe. He also purchased some devotional books, and on 12 May, paid the handsome sum of £5i.8s.2d (£19,312) for various gifts and expenses attendant upon the recent admission of 'Elizabeth Chaucy' to the prestigious Barking Abbey. This nun was probably the 'Elizabeth Chausier' who had entered St Helen's Priory in 1377, and thus almost certainly the daughter of Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer; there was no uniformity in spelling in the fourteenth century, and the involvement of the Duke further supports this identification. John's generous gesture — he had probably used his influence with the King to secure the necessary royal nomination, for without it, the daughter of a mere civil servant would never have gained entry to the aristocratic community at Barking — was perhaps made at the instigation of Katherine Swynford or Philippa Chaucer, or both, so that Elizabeth could join her cousin Margaret

Swynford. The large sum involved suggests that the Duke paid Elizabeth's dowry too, which was perhaps included with the gifts.

On 12 May, John left the Savoy; he could have had no idea that he would never see his beautiful palace again. Katherine probably rode northwards with him via Hertford, Bedford and Northampton, and when she said farewell to him, either at Northampton or possibly at Leicester around 20 May, she cannot have suspected that this was to be the end of nine illicit but happy years together, years during which she must have come to believe that she was an accepted and permanent part of his life, the love of his heart and the sole focus of his desire.

'Turning Away the Wrath of God'

At the beginning of June 1381, as John of Gaunt lay at Knaresborough, an army of yeomen and peasants was amassing in Kent and Essex, bent on the overthrow of a government that had imposed the cruelly oppressive poll tax and forced restrictive wage and price controls on labouring men whose services were in high demand after the depredations of the Black Death. The rebels had chosen for their leader — their 'idol', it was said — a man called Wat Tyler, and for their spokesmen one Jack Straw and an excommunicate priest, John Ball, who was going about the country preaching inflammatory and subversive sermons calling for the abolition of serfdom¹ and posing the question:

When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?

On 10 June, the insurgents occupied Canterbury, then began their march on London, new recruits swelling their forces along the way, until they were at least fifty thousand strong. It was as well that the chief object of their venom, the Duke of Lancaster, was by then nearing Berwick, because it was he, above all, whom they were determined to destroy -for was he not the most powerful man in the realm, and therefore the man responsible for all the woes that had befallen it? Therefore, as soon as they reached the eastern approaches of the City of London, and set up their camp at Blackheath on 12 June, the rebel leaders sent a petition to Richard II demanding the heads of men they deemed traitors. John of Gaunt's name was at the top of the list.

We do not know where Katherine was at this time. If she had indeed travelled north with John, parted from him at Leicester around 20 May and then ridden home to Kettlethorpe, she would surely have heard by now of the march of the people, because there were associated risings in other parts of the country, including East Anglia. Katherine was no fool: she realised that her notorious relationship with the Duke made her especially vulnerable, and that her very life might be in danger - a fear that was to be proved justified in the coming days. So, the author of the *Anonimalle Chronicle* tells us, she 'went into hiding where no one knew where to find her for a long

time', no doubt taking her children with her; given that she had with her a new baby, she probably felt especially vulnerable. Philippa of Lancaster may have gone with them, for there is no record of Philippa's whereabouts during the coming crisis, and Katherine was responsible for her.⁴

It is unlikely that Katherine went to Kettlethorpe or Lincoln, for she was too well-known in those places and could easily be found. Nor would it have been wise to go to any of the Duke's properties in the threatened areas, and she was almost certainly not at the Savoy. It is possible, but not probable, that she sought refuge at Wesenham Place, a house in King's Lynn that the Duke gave her at some unspecified date, for John Spanye, a cobbler of King's Lynn, was ranting round the area, inciting the people to slaughter the unpopular Flemish weavers who had for decades been settled in East Anglia. Of course, Katherine was a Hainaulter, not a Fleming, but an ignorant mob would not have made such a fine distinction; to them, she was a foreigner, the mistress of the most detested man in the land, and thus an object of hatred. It is feasible, of course, that Katherine sought refuge in a convent, the traditional place of safety for women, but — as will be seen - there is some reason to believe that she hid herself away in Pontefract Castle, that great Lancastrian stronghold in Yorkshire, and sent word to the Duke of her whereabouts.

Meanwhile, as the 'savage hordes approached the City like waves of sea', the young King's councillors had panicked and taken refuge with him in the Tower. When, on Thursday 13 June, Richard II failed to respond to their demands, the rebels lost patience and 'with cruel eagerness for the slaughter' surged across London Bridge into the City, where, reinforced by hundreds of sympathetic Londoners and hot-headed apprentices, they embarked on a frenzy of destruction and bloodletting. 'Burn! Kill!' was their chilling cry.⁸

They opened the prisons, torched houses and brothels, and broke into Lambeth Palace, which they fired, and the Temple, where they destroyed valuable documents. Flooding into the Strand in the afternoon, they saw before them the great edifice of the Savoy, white and beautiful against the summer sky. In that moment, the wondrous palace was doomed, for to the insurgents it represented all that was hateful to them: the power of the despised Duke of Lancaster, the authority of feudal lordship, and the wealth of the landed classes.

Into the Savoy surged the mob, thirty thousand strong, their righteous purpose to destroy rather than loot. 'They made proclamation that

none, on pain to lose his head, should convert to his own use anything that there was, but that they should break such as was found.' They killed the guards at the gates, then poured into the cellars, where they smashed the great casks of fine wines, and watched in glee as the gold and ruby liquid spilled over the flagstones. 'We are not thieves and robbers, we are true commons, zealots for truth and justice!' the people cried. Then they raced upstairs to the Duke's treasury, whence they dragged a wealth of gold and silver plate. This they battered with axes, before hauling the lot out to the terrace and hurling it into the Thames. The jewels and precious stones they ground in mortars or underfoot, and their residue also went into the river.

Some were raiding the ducal wardrobe, pulling out elegant garments of cloth of gold, and armour; an expensive quilted jack (a protective garment worn under a breastplate) belonging to John of Gaunt was set up as a target for arrows, in the absence of its owner, and then hacked to pieces. 'We will have no king named John!' trumpeted 'the yokel band'. Others were ripping tapestries, cushions, napery, rich silk hangings and illuminated manuscripts, or chopping up fine furniture. All were carried to the great hall and heaped in a pile, which was then set alight. Soon the blaze had taken hold, and the palace was engulfed in flames. The conflagration was complete when three barrels of gunpowder stored in the cellars — and thought by the rebels to contain gold and silver — were hurled into the fire and exploded. One fool was cast alive into the inferno by his furious companions 'because he minded to have reserved one piece of plate for himself', and in the cellars below, thirty-two of his fellows, drunk and carousing on the Duke's wine, were trapped when the roof caved in, and slowly perished: their 'cries and lamentations' could be heard by curious citizens 'for seven days afterwards'.⁰ In the end, all that was left of the great Savoy was a pile of charred masonry, lead and ashes: all had been utterly destroyed.

Meanwhile, north of London, a yeoman band was ransacking Hertford Castle; elsewhere in the Lancastrian domains there were attacks on John of Gaunt's servants and property," and in Essex, one of his unfortunate squires was beheaded. At Leicester, the terrified keeper of the wardrobe loaded the Duke's clothes and treasures onto five carts and demanded that the Abbot of Leicester take them into safekeeping, but the Abbot, also 'in great fear', flatly refused, so the keeper was obliged to store his hoard in the churchyard of St Mary's Church in the Newarke. Men who wore

Lancastrian livery badges prudently tore them off and made

themselves scarce. There can be no doubt that had the Duke himself fallen into the hands of the insurgents, he would have met with a violent end.

In the midst of the chaos, and with the sky red with the glow from the burning Savoy, the fourteen-year-old King's courage shone clear. He would meet with the rebels, he said, and parley with them. On 14 June, he rode forth to Mile End and fearlessly faced Wat Tyler, who petitioned the King for the abolition of serfdom and the right to deal with traitors — there was no mistaking whom he meant. Richard agreed to all his demands, but as this meeting was taking place, the mob was still running riot in London. This time, their target was the Flemish merchant community, resented as aliens, and for the commercial privileges they enjoyed and the wealth they had amassed. The rebels brutally dragged thirty-five of these unfortunate wretches out of St Martin's Church in Vintry and systematically beheaded them in the street;³ over a hundred more were hunted down and lynched, and that, surely, would have been the fate of Katherine Swynford, had the malcontents found her in London; she also was a foreigner hailing from the Low Countries, and the rebels had far more cause to butcher her: if the head of John of Gaunt was among the foremost of their demands, that of his mistress would have been forfeit too.

Chaucer clearly perceived the danger that threatened his wife and her sister. Not only were they aliens, but they both were also closely connected with the Duke. Chaucer does not make many political references in his poems, but in 'The Nun's Priest's Tale', written perhaps a decade later, he reveals how personally affected he was by the Peasants' Revolt:

So hideous was the noise, *a benedicite* [bless us]! Certes he, Jack Straw, and all his meinie [retinue], Ne made never shouts half so shrill When that they would any Fleming kill.

It sounds as if Chaucer had heard those chilling yells himself.

The mob also breached the Tower's defences and ransacked the armoury. Some burst into the Princess Joan's chamber, where — as they tore her bed-hangings apart - one man made so bold as to snatch a kiss from her. The shock (whether of the attack or the kiss is uncertain) was so great that she fainted. Fourteen-year-old Henry of Derby, John of Gaunt's heir, was smuggled out of the Tower in the nick of time, but old Simon Sudbury, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was not so lucky: he was seized whilst at prayer in St John's Chapel in

the White Tower, dragged outside to Tower Hill and there horrifically decapitated, it needing eight blows to sever his head. Sir Robert Hales, the Lord Treasurer, and John of Gaunt's physician, Brother William Appleton, suffered a similar fate.

The next day, 15 June, Richard II again met with the rebels, this time at Smithfield, and again - 'saving only the legality of his crown' - agreed to all their demands, including one for a new version of Magna Carta. But while he was speaking with Wat Tyler, Sir William Walworth, the hardline Lord Mayor of London, appalled at the familiarity with which the peasant leader was treating the King - calling him 'brother' and staying in the saddle drinking ale when he should have been kneeling — tried to arrest Tyler. Tyler retaliated by drawing his dagger, whereupon Walworth fatally stabbed him. Seeing their leader cut down, Tyler's followers were ready to erupt in outrage, but the young King — with great presence of mind — stayed them, raising his hand and declaring, 'I will be your leader! You shall have no captain but me!' Promising them all parchments confirming that they would be made free men, he persuaded the rebels to disperse peacefully, which they did, believing that all they had asked for had been granted.

How wrong they were. Walworth immediately rode off to raise an army. The Council, scared out of its wits at the demonstrations that had just taken place, was determined to crush any moves to change the old order. There were to be no parchments, just summary justice and bloody reprisals — two hundred were hanged. 'Serfs ye are, and serfs ye will remain,' the young King now said, forgetting his promises. By the end of June, the 'great mischief, as Froissart called it, had been decisively crushed. The only good thing to come out of it, as far as John of Gaunt was concerned, was a degree of public sympathy and outrage ignited by the wanton destruction of his property.

By 19 June, news of the Peasants' Revolt and the destruction of the Savoy had reached John of Gaunt at Berwick. We can only imagine its immediate impact on him, although 'he heard the tidings with a cheerful countenance, as though he were unmoved by them, and kept them to himself'.⁷ But his actions during the days to come strongly suggest that he was profoundly shocked and had come rapidly to view his devastating losses, the violent hostility towards him, and the danger in which he still stood not just as the appalling consequences of national unrest, but also as clear proof of divine displeasure with his immoral ways. He considered, says Knighton, 'on every side the past events of his life, and everything that he had done, to see

whether he had offended, either privately or publicly, the King or the realm, in such wise that he might deserve the fate that had fallen upon him. And weighing all justly in his mind, he fastened his mind upon God.' One thing above all 'turned in his mind ... He frequently had heard, both from churchmen [who no doubt included his Carmelite confessor, Walter Dyssel and from members of his own household, that his reputation was greatly tarnished in all parts of the realm. He had paid no attention to what was said to him, because he was blinded by desire, fearing neither God nor shame amongst men.' The object of that blind desire had, of course, been Katherine Swynford. Now, 'considering these things, and inspired by the grace of God, he turned about and, committing himself wholly to the divine mercy, and promising that he would reform his life, he vowed to God that he would, as soon as he was able, remove that lady from his household, so that there could be no further offence'. Walsingham says that, in making private confession of his sins, John 'blamed himself for the deaths of [those] who had been laid low by impious violence' during the Peasants' Revolt, and 'reproached himself for his liaison with Katherine Swynford, or rather renounced it'.

Practical considerations came first. Immediately, the Duke, displaying great presence of mind and no sign of fear, ordered the garrisoning of all his castles.¹⁸ That same day, 19 June, he agreed with the sympathetic Scots a renewal of the truce until February 1383. Then he left Berwick and rode south, but when he sought a lodging with his former ally, Henry Percy, Percy snubbed him. Fearing no doubt to be associated with the unpopular John of Gaunt, he told him he would not be welcome at any of his castles until he, Percy, had been assured by the King that the Duke could be trusted. Bitterly insulted, a despairing John decided to retreat to Edinburgh.

The shock and the strain he had suffered had had a profound effect on him. When dismissing his servants, who were not to be obliged to share his exile, he broke down and made an astonishing public announcement, declaring 'with tears and expressions of grief that 'he observed that God wished to chastise him for his misdeeds and the evil life that he had for long led, namely in the sin of lechery, in which he had particularly associated with Dame Katherine de Swynford, a she-devil and enchantress, and with many others in his wife's household, against the will of God and the laws of Holy Church'. Accordingly, he had decided to renounce Katherine (and presumably the others), and he assured those around him that he had promised the complete 'amendment of his way of life to God'. 'By these devices, so he believed, he placated the Lord's anger,' observed Walsingham.

Needless to say, the chroniclers were unanimous in applauding the Duke's belated realisation of his folly, and in their version of events, it is Katherine — the woman, the temptress — who emerges as the villain of the piece. Knighton felt the Duke had been lucky to be spared a worse fate, and imputed his being in the north when 'those wicked wretches' struck to the work of divine Providence.

Wakingham, who was convinced that John's renunciation of Katherine 'turned away the wrath of God', was to write more kindly of him in the future. In fact, all the chroniclers viewed that renunciation as a crucial turning point in the Duke's life, and they are hardly likely to have continued to do so had they not been convinced that it was genuine. Moreover, they clearly believed that he saw it as a turning point too.

Was it John who used the words 'she-devil and enchantress', or was the description that of the anonymous chronicler of York? The passage reads as if the writer was reporting the Duke's actual speech, although he could not of course have been there to hear it in person. Perhaps he heard a garbled version of it, repeated by travellers. But these particular words could well be a monastic interpolation, born of moral outrage and the belief that women employed the snares of the devil to entice men to sin; we do not, from other sources, get a sense of the Duke feeling — as did many mediaeval men — that in some way he had been the victim of a woman's wiles, or lured by witchcraft to fall from grace. On the contrary, he made it repeatedly clear that he himself bore the responsibility for his sins: he did not try to blame Katherine. In this respect, Walsingham's hasty qualification in his account of John's renunciation of her is most revealing: the Duke, he says, 'abhorred, *or rather abjured*, the fellowship of that concubine of his' (author's italics).

In Edinburgh, John was made most welcome. Lodged at Holyrood Abbey, he gave further evidence of repenting his former sinful existence, again declaring his intention of expelling Katherine from his household. On 23 June, again in keeping with his new resolve to change his mode of life, he summoned the Duchess Constance to come north to him at once, and directed his receiver in Lancashire to entrust her with urgently needed funds. Six days later, having heard that Constance was at Knaresborough, and not knowing if she was safe, he made plans for a rescue attempt, summoning a force to meet him at Berwick on 13 July.

John stayed in Edinburgh until 10 July, awaiting Richard II's assurance that it would be safe for him to return to London, and —

more to the point — that the King would welcome him there. When this was forthcoming, he rode speedily south via Berwick — where he was joined by his military escort — Bamburgh, Newcastle, Durham and Northallerton, which he reached on 19 July. Here he met his wife, who had left Knaresborough and was travelling north in response to his summons.

Constance had suffered a nightmare journey. Terrified in case she herself become a target of the rebels, she had fled north from Hertford and sought refuge in Pontefract Castle, only to find the gates barred to her by its faint-hearted - or perhaps over-cautious - constable, who said he did not dare to admit her. Hearing this, many of her frightened servants deserted her, so, 'smitten in her heart with great fear', and with only a small escort, she rode by lanternlight through the night and the forest, braving footpads and outlaws, to Knaresborough Castle, where to her relief the castellan afforded her a sympathetic welcome. This experience had left her thoroughly frightened and vulnerable, and she now looked 'to find safety under the wing of her lord'.

Seeing the Duke approaching, and with her retinue drawn up behind her, Constance went to meet him. There, on the road, she prostrated herself three times before him, as if *she* were the one in need of forgiveness — John may not have been the only one whom recent events had shocked into a fit of conscience. Quickly he dismounted, raised her up, took her by the hand and kissed her, then listened compassionately to her woeful tale, while she in turn expressed sorrow at the perils and misfortunes that had befallen him. At length, John asked her pardon for 'his misdeeds to her', and 'she forgave him willingly'. That evening, they repaired to the Bishop of Durham's strongly fortified and moated palace, a favourite stopping place of royalty that stood two hundred yards west of All Saints' Church, Northallerton, 'and there was great joy and celebration between them, and with their companions that day and night'.²⁹

We can only imagine with what reluctance John of Gaunt returned to his wife. Severing his emotional and physical connections with Katherine must have been deeply painful, however strong his moral convictions. There can be little doubt that he genuinely felt he had to make amends for his sins, but there was probably more to it than that. Never a man to concern himself overly with public opinion, he must yet have been aware of the need to defuse the threatening situation in which he now found himself, and to make it clear that he was abandoning a way of life that had conceivably brought down divine

vengeance upon him, and indeed upon the kingdom. To have persisted in it would have been to court further disaster.

His concern was not only for himself. Perry makes the pertinent point that the Duke's property had been destroyed, his physician and several officers murdered and his wife thoroughly frightened, while the mob had violently targeted the Flemings and demanded his own head. Only by disassociating himself from Katherine, therefore, could he hope to protect her and their children.

There were political considerations too. John now had much more realistic hopes of winning the throne of Castile, and would have realised that he stood a greater chance of success — with Parliament and the Castilians, as well as the Almighty - if he presented a united front with Constance. A convincing reconciliation was therefore imperative. In this, the Duke and Duchess would willingly collaborate, brought together by their shared ambitions and by his increasing reliance on her knowledge of her kingdom, her judgement and her advice.

Only compelling reasons such as these could have persuaded him that he must give up Katherine Swynford. Was he sincere? Did he truly mean to sever all illicit connections with her? At the time, almost certainly he did. There is no doubt that the Peasants' Revolt had been cataclysmic for him.

It might also be argued that, after nine years together and four children, John had tired of Katherine anyway, but the facts do not bear this out: the two of them were to keep in touch, mutually supportive of each other, for many years to come, while John proved a good father to their children, continued to extend his patronage to Katherine's family, and eventually risked public censure by marrying her, while she clearly continued to play an important role in his life. All those things argue a deep-seated and long-cherished love between them — in which case, John's public renunciation of Katherine and all that they meant to each other must have cost him dear, and occasioned him deep private suffering. It is surely no coincidence that, on 23 July, just days after he announced his intention of separating from her, he granted land for the foundation of a chapel dedicated to her name-saint and the Virgin Mary — for whom he himself had a special devotion - at Roecliffe in Yorkshire; nor would it be too far-fetched to imagine that he was founding this chapel in the hope that the grateful saints would guard and watch over Katherine in the difficult days ahead. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the

chapel was ever built, so perhaps the Duke came to a belated awareness that openly associating himself with a foundation dedicated to his repudiated mistress's name-saint was not the wisest of gestures.

Knighton, often well-informed, says that as soon as John returned to his estates in England, he 'at once took occasion to send [Katherine] away, that she should no longer dwell with him'. The wording of this passage suggests that she was already with him when he returned — which we know was not the case — or waiting for them to be reunited at a prearranged location. As to returning to his estates, John was at Pontefract Castle from 20 to 21 July, before meeting up with Constance, and at Leicester from 28 July to 4 August. Constance's presence apart, the Mayor of Leicester had called out the militia at the height of the Peasants' Revolt, anticipating an attack on the castle, so it is hardly likely that Katherine had sought refuge there. But she might have been at Pontefract: the twelfth-century castle was strongly fortified and garrisoned, some good way north, and easily accessible from Lincolnshire - just the kind of place where the Duke would have sent his lady for safety, for he had ordered his household to go there when he went to Edinburgh, and had arranged for firewood and barrels of the best wine to be delivered to them.⁵¹ It was also, as the centre of the Lancastrian administration and one of the favoured northern residences of the Duke, who had expended a fortune on lavish improvements there, a fitting residence for Philippa of Lancaster, who — as has been noted - may have been with Katherine. And Katherine's presence there might have been one of the reasons why the Duchess Constance was refused admittance. Considering that the Duke's household was already lodging there, there were no grounds for the constable to bar the door to his Duchess.

Knighton implies that John imparted his fateful decision to Katherine in person before sending her away. We can only imagine that excruciatingly painful interview and the devastating impact his renunciation would have had on her. Not only had she lost her royal lover, but she was also to lose her position in the Lancastrian household. There was no question now that she could remain as governess or companion to Philippa of Lancaster—her name was too synonymous with scandal— and in February 1382 an entry in *John of Gaunt's Register* referring to her as 'recently governess of our daughters' confirms that she had ceased to occupy that office.³⁴ We may assume that her duties came to an end at the same time as her affair with the Duke, when she delivered Philippa into his care.

What is likely is that, at the same time as he informed Katherine that

their sexual relations must cease, John assured her that she would always have his friendship and that he would continue to look after the interests of their children - his actions in the years to come bear this out. The fact that their relations remained amicable — at the very least — confirms that he made the break as kindly as possible. Of course, they would have a legitimate reason — and need - for keeping in touch with each other: the young Beauforts.

Shocked and desolate as she must have been, Katherine may yet have shared John's qualms of conscience and fear of divine retribution - such was the mediaeval mindset. She may have been shocked to hear that he had had other women during the course of their nine-year relationship. But she was also, clearly, a survivor. Initially, she probably returned to Kettlethorpe, trying to recover her equilibrium and decide what she should do. Certainly she would never be in want: the Duke's generous provision for her had seen to that, while she had been a careful preserver of her son's inheritance. And there was to be further proof of John's care for her: on 7 September 1381, he substantially increased her annuity to 200 marks (£24,831) for life, in consideration of 'her good service to his daughters' - and possibly to reward Katherine for sheltering Philippa during the Peasants' Revolt. This grant has been seen as a pay-off," and it probably does mark the formal termination of Katherine's service as governess. Ten days later, the Duke ordered that moneys owing to her 'from the issues of land and tenements' that belonged to her ward, Eustacia de Savenby, be paid; and if the tenants did not pay their dues, the lieutenant of Tickhill was to 'distrain the lands and tenements of all goods and chattels'.

It was probably later in 1381 that Katherine (perhaps using her new funds) took a lease on the Chancery, a fine house in Minster Yard (the cathedral close) in Lincoln, which was to remain her town residence until at least 1393. The fact that she kept this house on for at least twelve years argues that it was at first a refuge for her, a place that had no connections with the Duke, and that in time she came to feel at home in it. The Cathedral Close must have held some happy memories for her: at least one of her children had been baptised (and perhaps born) there, and she was apparently well thought of by the clergy who resided in the neighbouring houses. Maybe she was grateful for their support, and the chance to withdraw into this closed and protective community, a world dominated by the regular pealing of the cathedral bells.

At the Chancery, as at Kettlethorpe, Katherine lived in some state.

This important house had been the official residence of the cathedral chancellors since 1321, but was some years older than that, having been built before 1260, when it was leased by Canon Thomas Ashby; at that time, it had probably occupied the site of the brick range that now fronts Pottergate, the street that lies east of the cathedral; the vanished church of St Margaret, where Thomas Swynford was baptised, stood opposite on what is today a green situated beside by the Greestone Stairs to the city, while the Bishop's Palace lay a few yards to the west. When Chancellor Anthony Bek (later Bishop of Norwich) acquired the house in 1321, needing adequate space for study and recreation, he built a wing stretching north at right angles to the existing building, added a stately timber hall and extended the garden, creating a grand residence. For this, he was paying an annual rent of 10s. (£172) — a pittance for such a fine house. Fourteen new windows were inserted in the property by carpenters in 1343, at which time the Chancery boasted at least one stone privy.

The Chancellor was the senior clergyman responsible for overseeing the diocesan grammar schools and the cathedral library. The close, which was surrounded by a strong high wall, two turrets of which still stand in the garden of the Chancery, contained the Deanery and other spacious houses for the cathedral canons, some of which survive at least in part today. For much of the second half of the fourteenth century, thanks to the Black Death and poor endowments, chancellors were in short supply, and consequently the Chancery - the oldest of the clergy houses, and known by this name before Katherine's time — was sublet and rented out to various persons in succession, including a number of canons, the 'Lady of Withornwick' (who came from a knightly family in Holderness) in 1379-81, and after her, Katherine Swynford.

By the end of the 1380-1 financial year, the Lady of Withornwick had vacated the house, then from 1381 to 1386, an unnamed female tenant paid the very reasonable annual rent of 40s. (£751), plus 10s. (£188) towards the cathedral's fabric fund. This must have been Katherine, because in 1386-7 we find 'the Lady Katherine, renter of the house' doing repairs there. In 1391-2, Katherine Swynford is again referred to in the Chapter accounts, when the new Chancellor, John Huntman (who had been appointed in 1390) received a remittance from the Chapter on account of the Chancery, because it was then occupied by her by 'an old grant of the Chapter' (which no longer exists), and was obliged to ask for another house in which to live. Katherine therefore appears to have taken out a long lease on the Chancery, for at least twelve — and possibly fifteen — years, because

of which poor John Huntman was unable to take possession of his official residence until after 1396. It was in 1390-2 that John of Gaunt secured a settlement highly favourable to the close in a long-running dispute with the Bail, so the Chapter are hardly likely to have put pressure on Katherine to vacate the Chancery at that time.

In moving into this almost exclusively ecclesiastical male enclave, which was inhabited by nearly 130 men in holy orders in 1377, Katherine was isolating herself from the citizens of Lincoln - with whom she was clearly not popular, as will be seen — and surrounding herself by people who had shown themselves friendly, such as the canons who had served as sponsors at the font for her son, who were now among her neighbours.³⁸ However, their willingness to accept such a notorious woman into their community may have stemmed not so much from their past esteem of her as from a desire to ensure that John of Gaunt continued to show favour to the close, especially in its endemic conflicts with the Bail; as a member of its Confraternity, he had a great spiritual affinity with the cathedral, which must have predisposed him to partiality towards the close. The cathedral's sub-Dean, John of Belvoir, seems to have been instrumental in obtaining the tenancy for Katherine. In so doing, he and his brethren were acknowledging the continuing friendship that was perceived to be between her and the Duke after the ending of their love affair.

It may be too that, knowing Katherine as they had done since before she became the Duke's mistress, the canons realised that she was a woman of greater integrity than most people gave her credit for - and, of course, she was now no longer living in sin. One canon, John Dalton, left her a silver cup when he died in 1402; another made provision for prayers to be said for her soul and that of the Duke in the Chapel of Spital in Lincolnshire. Evidently she was held in some regard by her new neighbours.

The Chancery is still lived in by the Chancellor today, and a substantial amount of it survives from Katherine's time. Although the redbrick front facade with its gatehouse and great chamber dates only from the early Tudor period, the north gable of the street range, and the stone-and-timber wing projecting northwards at right angles from the street, which incorporates Katherine's solar and chapel and the screens passage from her great hall, are of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century respectively. The great hall itself does not survive, but once extended across what is now the garden, lying parallel with the gatehouse; in Katherine's day it had courtyards on either side, and the central hearth was possibly on the site of the present ornamental

pond. We know the hall was timber-framed because the parliamentary surveyors who inspected the property for Oliver Cromwell in 1649 mistook the derelict structure for a 'large shed open to the roof; this last detail probably refers to a mediaeval *louvre* that allowed the smoke from the fire to escape. Fortunately, the commissioners recorded the measurements of this building: at 40' by 28', this was no shed, but a mediaeval hall of imposing proportions, with entrance doors on either side. Unfortunately for posterity, it was demolished in 1714.

The dais where Katherine would have presided at table over her household, and sometimes entertained John of Gaunt, has long disappeared therefore, but the surviving screens passage boasts three fine doorways, each adorned with corbel heads of a king and a bishop. The left one led to the buttery, which still has a fourteenth-century window, and the right gave access to the pantry and the kitchen beyond (which also had a *louvre*), while the middle door opened on to a straight flight of stairs leading up to the chapel, where Katherine would have worshipped and heard Mass. The small chapel has a fourteenth-century triple-lancet window, an aumbry for the Blessed Sacrament, and a *piscina* with a delicately sculpted ogee arch. The windows and floor date mainly from the late fifteenth century.

Katherine's solar, a private first-floor apartment built around 1300 and located between the Tudor frontage and the chapel anteroom, is unrecognisable today, having been divided into bedrooms and corridors. Like the adjacent chapel, it was open to the roof beams in her day. The solar was the chamber in which she had her bed (the most expensive item of furniture she would have owned), received visitors informally, sought refuge from the world, and perhaps bathed in a wooden tub lined with white cloth and filled with scented water.

The small anteroom to the chapel has a fourteenth-century squint, permitting the observation of Mass in private. Such squints were sometimes used to enable people excluded from services, such as lepers, to be present without infecting others, but they were also used to facilitate the sight of one altar from another, ensuring co-ordination in the administering of communion, so it could be that the chapel was too small to accommodate all Katherine's household at Mass, and that some people were obliged to worship in the anteroom. An alternative theory is that the anteroom, which was adjacent to her solar, may have served as Katherine's private oratory; we know that she had twice before received permission to have portable altars, so evidently she had a penchant for solitary devotion. Possibly she preferred to participate in services apart from her household.

Katherine's great chamber, the 'lord's chamber' of 1343, where she — and perhaps the Duke on occasion — formally received visitors, was long ago demolished to make way for the Tudor wing fronting the street. Above the pantry and kitchen to the north of the property, according to the 1649 survey, were six lodging chambers with garrets above, now also long gone. Possibly these chambers had once provided accommodation for Katherine's children and guests, with the servants upstairs in the attics.

Below the fourteenth-century wing and the gatehouse were cellars for storage. We cannot be sure that the brew-house and wood-house that adjoined the kitchen in 1649 and had servants' quarters above were there in Katherine's time. The parliamentary survey also records a stableyard with stone stables incorporating three bays, a hayloft above and a tiled roof, but given Katherine's status and the likely size of her household, her stables were probably larger, for in 1391, we will find her keeping twelve horses in John of Gaunt's stable-block. In 1649, the three gardens (or 'courts') belonging to the Chancery contained fruit trees.

To assert, as Lucraft does, that there is 'much evidence' that John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford were 'very much still together' in the 1380s (a decade in which he was in fact abroad for over three years) is perhaps to overstate the case. In order to determine the nature of their relationship in the period from 1381 to 1396, we have to look for clues in just two dozen or so references to Katherine in records of this period (some of which have nothing to do with John of Gaunt). It is important to remember that these official records give us no more comprehensive a picture of relations between John and Katherine than do those that are extant for the period during which they are known to have been lovers. For these records are not complete — less so than before, in fact, for *John of Gaunt's Register* survives only up to 1383. It is circumstantial evidence that suggests that the Duke had less frequent dealings with Katherine than he had prior to 1381.

There can be no question, though, that Katherine continued to play a part - possibly an important one - in his life, nor that other people were aware of this. John continued to provide generously for her and their children, and sent her gifts, as before; moreover, it is clear that he was seen to be her protector. They obviously remained on good terms and mutually supportive, she lending him money when he needed it, and he showing marked favour to her family. Both the Dean and Chapter at Lincoln on the one part, in 1381, and Richard II on the other, in 1383, 1384, 1387, 1388 and 1389, recognised that, if they

wanted to please the Duke and retain his powerful support, they should show favour to Katherine Swynford. And Katherine herself continued to be a woman of influence and standing, which must be attributed to her connection with John of Gaunt.

Of course, this could all have stemmed from the fact that she was the mother of the Duke's children. Yet few royal mistresses had ever achieved such status, and the fact that Katherine did is surely evidence of his continuing esteem and love for her — as, of course, is the fact that he later married her, in an age when it was virtually unheard of for princes to wed the mothers of their bastards. But love can be expressed in many different ways, and it looks very much as if, until 1389 at least, John kept his word and refrained from her bed.

The soundest argument in favour of their relationship remaining platonic, at least for the present, is that Katherine is not known to have borne any more children. She was only in her thirties, and had conceived fairly frequently during her years with John and her marriage to Hugh; nor was there any effective contraception that might have facilitated the secret continuance of sexual relations.

Then there is the fact that no chronicler — and Walsingham in particular was quick to censure the Duke — even so much as hinted that the affair was still going on after the public renunciation; given its notoriety beforehand, we might expect people to have been on the lookout for signs that the erstwhile lovers had fallen from grace. But there was no further scandal. No, the picture we have, at least for the 1380s - as will become clear — is one of affection and mutual support, driven and cemented by the common bond of the couple's children.

From 1381 to 1386, John of Gaunt remained at the forefront of the English political scene. He dominated the Council and Parliament, and played a leading role in diplomacy. At the same time, he was pursuing his quest for the Castilian crown, vigorously promoting 'the way of Spain' as England's best chance of defeating the French. Knighton says that, after the perils he had endured, the honour in which he was now held was a great consolation to him; and he seems to have achieved some peace of mind and conscience too, for at length 'joy came to the Duke, and to those who were dear to him'. 'He drew such strength from his virtue that he sought no revenge, but patiently forgave the offences of anyone who sought forgiveness.' Only two men were brought to trial for having assisted in the destruction of the Savoy.

It was John who met the new Queen, Anne of Bohemia — 'so good, so fair, so debonair', according to Chaucer — as she disembarked at Dover, and John who escorted her through the streets of London prior to her wedding to Richard II in January 1382 at Westminster. (It was Anne who introduced the horned headdress, or 'moonytire', into England, a fashion that Katherine Swynford may well have worn.) At the end of that month, John asked Parliament for a loan to finance an expedition to Castile, but the response was generally unenthusiastic.

John of Gaunt never rebuilt the Savoy. Instead, he left the blackened ruin as it was, a stark reminder of the violence done to his property;⁴³ the site would remain derelict until Henry VII built the Hospital of the Savoy on it over a century later. The Duke concentrated instead on making Kenilworth the Lancastrian showpiece, and when he was needed in London, he resided at Hertford Castle - its roof was restored in 1383 with lead from the Savoy— or in the Bishop of London's palace at Fulham, or at La Neyte (also known as the Neate), the country residence of the Abbot of Westminster, located by the River Tyburn in the area that is now Bayswater and Hyde Park.

Historians have long debated the implications of the quitclaim that John of Gaunt issued to Katherine Swynford on 14 February 1382 in London. Its text is as follows:

John, by the grace of God, King of Castile, etc., greetings.

Let it be known that we have remised [a legal term meaning relinquished or surrendered], released and entirely from ourselves and our heirs quitclaimed the Lady Katherine de Swynford, recently governess of our daughters, Philippa and Elizabeth of Lancaster, and all manner of actions concerning her that we have, have had, and could possibly have in the future, reckoned by an agreement of debt, transaction, or whatever other means from the beginning of this world up to the day of the completion of these presents. And so that neither ourselves, our heirs, nor our executors, nor anyone else through us, or in our name, may in the future by reason of some premise or other, demand or be able to vindicate any claim or right concerning the aforementioned Lady Katherine, her heirs or her executors; but from all actions let us be totally excluded by the witness of these presents. In testimony of which we affix our private seal to this, with the sign of our ring on the reverse.

Confusion has long reigned as to the purpose of this document: was it drawn up to protect John's interests or Katherine's? The answer lies in

understanding what a quitclaim deed actually was. Since mediaeval times, it has been a document in which the granter relinquishes all rights and interests in a property to the grantee. The granter is the person who has sold or transferred a piece of property, or an interest in it, and the grantee is the person who has received it. Thus, in issuing a quitclaim, the granter 'quits' any claims to the property referenced in the deed. To quote a simplistic example, in the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the knight, referring to a weapon, says: 'I quit claim to it. He shall keep it as his own.'

And that was exactly what John of Gaunt was doing when — on behalf of himself and his heirs — he quit all claims to the property and other assets he had granted Katherine Swynford. Which is a very far cry from asserting - as many writers have done - that he intended that neither she nor her children were ever again to have any claim on himself and his heirs. On the contrary, it was a most generous and loving gesture intended to protect the interests of Katherine and the Beauforts and ensure they were handsomely provided for.

I am indebted to Joan Potton for pointing out the significance of the document being issued on St Valentine's Day. In the late fourteenth century, it was believed that birds paired up and mated on that day; the custom of choosing a 'Valentine' did not emerge until the fifteenth century, but the connection of lovers with St Valentine may go as far back as the emergence of the cults of two Roman martyrs of that name, and the tradition probably became popular with the development of the mediaeval concept of courtly love. Thus there was a clear association between love and St Valentine's Day in 1382, when John of Gaunt issued the quitclaim deed, and the choice of this date — surely no accident — was perhaps to reassure Katherine that the Duke still secretly cherished deep feelings for her, even if they could not be lovers as before.

Other evidence shows that he was still very protective of her welfare and determined to be a good lord to her family. On 20 February 1382, he sent Katherine a gift of two tuns of Gascon wine, one from Bristol, the other from Rothwell.⁴⁷ *John of Gaunt's Register* shows that by 1382, young Thomas Swynford was already a member of the Duke's retinue, serving as a soldier and shield-bearer, which suggests that John had taken him into his service as soon as he was old enough to be useful and promoted him quickly; Silva-Vigier credibly suggests that he had willingly assumed a fatherly role in the boy's life. Now, in 1382, he placed Thomas, aged fifteen, in the retinue of Henry of

Derby, a youth of his own age, to whom Thomas seems to have acquired a lifelong attachment.

That same year, Katherine and her daughter Joan Beaufort, who was five, were briefly in attendance on Henry of Derby's young wife, Mary de Bohun, who was still living in the household of her mother, the Countess of Hereford, at Rochford Hall in Essex. As has been mooted, Joan Beaufort may have been born under the Countess's roof, and named after her; the Countess, if she had been her sponsor at the font, would have taken a special interest in her.

On 1 February 1382, John had paid the Countess money for the maintenance of his daughter-in-law, Mary de Bohun, up till her fourteenth birthday, which fell on 15 February that year. Officially, Mary and Henry of Derby were not supposed to start cohabiting until then, but they had breached this rule at least seven months earlier, and Mary was now pregnant. She bore a son, Edward, on 24 April, at Rochford Hall, but he only lived four days. A week later, the disappointed young father — who had raced to be with his wife and hastily appointed a nurse and governor for his son - was taking part in the May Day jousts at Hereford (jousting was his newly discovered passion, delightedly encouraged by his father), perhaps chafing under the Duke's prohibition of any resumption of marital relations with Mary for the time being: she would not bear another child for five years.

Katherine's arrival in the Countess's household may have been timed to coincide with the birth of Mary's baby. Katherine had had long experience of looking after infants, and she was good with children and young people. Her association with Mary de Bohun was to endure until death severed it, suggesting that Mary regarded her as a friend and mentor. There is evidence too to show that Henry of Derby thought highly of Katherine - his regard and affection for her would become clearly evident in the years to come. It has been asserted by several writers that Katherine became at this time a permanent fixture in Mary's chamber, and that this provided a cover for her continuing intimacy with the Duke, but there is no evidence for this, and it would be three years before a household was set up for the young Earl and Countess of Derby. The lack of any further references to Katherine being in attendance on Mary in the ensuing months and years suggests that she was with her for only a short time in 1382, hardly evidence of a permanent position.

If John of Gaunt visited his son's wife when Katherine was at Rochford

Hall in 1382 (and there is no evidence that he did), he could have done so without incurring any scandal, for the Countess of Hereford, their mutual friend, was there to act as chaperone. We can only imagine how difficult John and Katherine found the first meetings after their parting, how long it was before they grew used to the fact that there could be no more between them than friendship, and how long before the pain ceased to be raw. Given that they probably resumed their affair some years on, we might surmise that their feelings for each other were never fully stifled, and that desire remained lively and had constantly to be suppressed.

On 6 May 1382, back in London, the Duke paid for gifts for his daughters, Mary de Bohun and Philippa Chaucer, who received another hanap.⁵⁰ With Katherine busily dividing her time between Kettlethorpe, Lincoln and the Derby household — and the affair between her and the Duke officially ended — Philippa Chaucer may have felt more comfortable about resuming her duties in the Duchess's household, although she remained based in Lincolnshire, probably residing with her sister, until at least 1383, and most likely till 1386. John's favour was still extended also to Geoffrey Chaucer, who — thanks no doubt to his influence — was appointed Controller of the Petty Customs of London on 8 May 1382.

That July, John and Henry of Derby visited Lincoln to witness the public recanting of a Lollard heretic, the hermit William Swinderby - whom John himself had once maintained - before Bishop Buckingham in the Chapter House of the cathedral. This was another example of John's new orthodoxy, but he did successfully intervene to save Swinderby from 'the bitterness of death' at the stake. With Katherine's house hard by — supposing she was in Lincoln at that time — it is hard to believe that John passed up the opportunity to visit her and their children there. By the end of July, he had moved on to Leicester.

Richard II was to figure large in Katherine's life. While John of Gaunt was in Lincoln, the young King, now fifteen, began exercising a degree of personal authority over the government. Despite his youth, and a slight stammer, he was already able to influence government policy and personally exercise patronage. Unfortunately, he chose to extend it to a favoured clique of unworthy but flattering courtiers, amongst whom the arrogant and incompetent Robert de Vere (son of the Earl of Oxford) was the foremost.⁵⁵ The early 1380s would witness the gradual emergence of this court faction, its struggle with the conservative John of Gaunt and the great nobles for supremacy, and the deterioration of John's relations with

Richard II. The same period also saw public enmity and resentment shifted from John of Gaunt, who was now beginning to be seen as a force for good in politics, to the profligate de Vere and his satellites.

Drip-fed vitriol by his favourites, the precocious and temperamental adolescent King came not only to resent his uncle's dominance, wealth and power, but also to chafe increasingly at being in tutelage to him. John had an inbred veneration for kingship, and was inclined to lecture his nephew on his duties and obligations, and to censure him for his profligate abuse of patronage. Naturally, this led to tension between them, with the teenaged Richard attempting to throw off the restraints with which the wiser and vastly more experienced Duke tried to control him, and John attempting to instil in his truculent and changeable nephew the principles of good government. Ignoring the ties of kinship and precedence, the King actively encouraged his favourites in their opposition to his uncle. They feared him, wrote a now-admiring Walsingham of the reformed John of Gaunt, 'because of his great power, his admirable judgement and his brilliant mind'. It was fortunate for Richard that his uncle had an unshakeable loyalty to the Crown.

Richard II grew up to be a true sybarite and aesthete, 'extravagantly splendid in his entertainments and dress, and too much devoted to luxury'.⁵⁷ He loved good food - he was the first English king to employ French chefs and the first to have a cookery book (*The Form of Cury*) dedicated to him — and his hospitality was legendary. Tall (his skeleton, found in 1871, measured six foot), fair and handsome in a rather feminine way, he adorned himself in fine, elegant clothing, furs and jewels, on which he was to lavish a fortune, and is said to have invented the handkerchief. Artistically inclined, he was to commission two portraits of himself, the first surviving painted portraits of an English king: the most famous is the Wilton Diptych (now in the National Gallery, London), in which the young King, sumptuously gowned in cloth of gold, and with his patron saints standing protectively behind him, kneels before the Virgin and Child; on the reverse is a white hart, Richard's personal emblem; the other portrait is a full-length of the King enthroned in majesty against a gold background, which now hangs in Westminster Abbey. That these are true portraits and not just iconic representations of a king is proved by their facial similarities, which bear close comparison with the effigy on Richard's tomb.

The Monk of Evesham accuses Richard II of 'remaining sometimes till midnight and sometimes till morning in drinking and other excesses

that are not to be named'. This could mean anything, but it may be that the writer did not wish to be too explicit. Walsingham charged Richard with being homosexual, but the King seems to have been attracted to both sexes: his devotion to his Queen, Anne of Bohemia, is dramatically well-attested, and even Walsingham admitted that the royal favourite, Robert de Vere, was a notorious womaniser, a 'Knight of Venus, more valiant in the bedchamber than on the field'; de Vere's torrid affair with Agnes Launcecron, one of the Queen's ladies, caused great scandal. But Richard's marriage produced no children, and he certainly was in thrall to, and influenced by, de Vere, who had proved himself assiduous in sycophantically cultivating his royal master. Their relationship, according to Walsingham, was 'not without signs' that 'obscene familiarity' was taking place, to which the disapproving chronicler attributed de Vere's rapid and undeserved promotion. It may be significant that in 1392, after de Vere had died abroad and was brought home for burial, Richard had his coffin opened so that he could look upon his face one last time and stroke his hands. Another contemporary chronicler, Adam of Usk, tells us that a charge of sodomy was later brought against Richard by his enemies, although this might have been mere politically desirable character assassination. It is possible that the effete Richard did indeed have latent homosexual tendencies, and that the charismatic and highly sexed de Vere was aware of this, exploited the King's devotion to the full, and was perhaps bisexual himself.

Richard's court - which Katherine would one day frequent - was to become one of the most celebrated in English history, for its chivalry, its art and culture, its literature, its strict protocol and elaborate ceremony, and its unprecedented splendour. In every respect it reflected the majesty of its monarch, a connoisseur and showman who set a new standard of luxury in his palaces, from the bathrooms with multicoloured floor tiles to the many beautiful *objets d'art* he acquired. It was Richard who employed Henry Yevele to modernise Westminster Hall by adding the magnificent hammerbeam roof that survives today. With his all-encompassing interests and discerning patronage, Richard II foreshadowed the multitalented princes of the Renaissance, for whom magnificence and courtesy were sacred maxims.

Froissart asserts that no English king before Richard had spent so much money on his court and household, and naturally there was much criticism of his extravagance. But female influence may account in part for that, for there is some evidence to indicate that there were far more women at court than in previous reigns — the closeness of the King's and Queen's households, the emphasis on love and chivalry,

the number of women admitted to the fraternity of the Garter, and the proportion of ladies featuring in courtly scenes — and Katherine Swynford would come in time to be a part of that female community.

There was a dark side to Richard, though. He emerged from his experiences during the Peasants' Revolt with an unshakeable conviction in his own heroism and superiority, and an aversion to taking advice. He was emotional, insecure, suspicious, devious and untrustworthy. His violent outbursts of temper were legendary, and he could be ruthless and vindictive when provoked. To Katherine Swynford and her children - whom he clearly liked — he would, however, prove a good friend.

Widespread conjecture that John of Gaunt's invasion of Castile was imminent was well founded, for in October 1382, a French invasion of England seemed likely, prompting calls for an Anglo-Portuguese military expedition to crush France's ally, Juan I of Castile. This was to be a veritable crusade, supported by the Church, with the Pope himself promising pardons for the sins of all those who assisted and accompanied the Duke. That November, John began making preparations for the campaign he hoped would at last win him a crown, but by March of 1383, a short-sighted Parliament had made it clear that it would not vote the necessary funds to support what many believed were the Duke's personal ambitions. Instead, Bishop Despenser of Norwich was to lead a force to France.

By 1383, John of Gaunt had granted Thomas Swynford the very handsome annuity of £40 (£16,288) — further evidence of his continuing patronage of Katherine's family. And the Duke was to be more generous still — in March, despite his major political preoccupations, he yet found time to grant Thomas a second annuity of 100 marks (£13,573) on his marriage to Jane Crophill of Nottingham. Jane may have been related to the Crophills who were members of the Trinity Guild of St Mary in that city, to which John of Gaunt, the Duchess Constance and Katherine Swynford also belonged;⁶ this important and wealthy guild had its chapel and altar in the north transept of St Mary's Church in High Pavement - the present church dates from c.1376, and the eighteenth-century Shire Hall now occupies the site of the House of the Trinity Guild, or Trinity House, as it later became known. Katherine's membership of this guild, like her properties in Boston and Grantham (see below), is perhaps indicative of the extent of her financial interests, or possibly of the willingness of corporate bodies to please John of Gaunt by showing favour to her. Apparently no one questioned the incongruity

and dubious moral value of extending membership of the Guild to his wife and his former mistress.

The parentage of Thomas's bride is unknown, but there are clues. The name Crophill occurs several times in the fourteenth century in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire. The family probably originated at Cropwell Bishop and Cropwell Butler, villages a mile apart, to the east of Nottingham, which in Domesday Book were both known as Crophill or Crophell. In the fourteenth century, three Crophills became mayors of Nottingham, and they were kinsmen of the royal House. Given her links with Nottingham, Katherine Swynford must have known the family, and it was probably she who arranged her son's marriage. Considering the Crophills' royal connections, and their status too, Katherine had done well for her son.

Jane must have been very young at the time of her marriage, or perhaps she failed to conceive for a long time or suffered a series of miscarriages and stillbirths, because the couple's only known son, named Thomas after his father, was not born until about 1406. There was probably a daughter, too, the Katherine Swynford who married Sir William Drury of Rougham, Suffolk, before 1428. The estimated date of their nuptials, and the fact that this Katherine died in 1478, suggests that she too was born late in the marriage, and that the elder Katherine Swynford never knew these grandchildren.

After his wedding, Thomas appears to have remained with Henry of Derby; he would be knighted before February 1386.

In April 1383, John of Gaunt acquiesced in the Council's decision to resolve the differences between England and Castile by peaceful means, and again he put his plans on hold, deferring his invasion until the following spring. Still suspicious of his motives, the Council secretly instructed the English envoys in Bayonne to prolong matters as long as possible, in order to delay the Duke's departure. As it happened, Juan I refused to abandon his alliance with France, so negotiations broke down.

John spent much of April at Kenilworth. Constance was with him to begin with, but left for Tutbury before he departed for the St George's festivities at Windsor: she evidently still preferred to hold herself aloof from the English court, and to remain in seclusion with her ladies. But the Duke had maintained great state while she was with him at Kenilworth, and his daily expenditure decreased significantly after she left. Clearly he was still treating her with great respect and deference,

deliberately emphasising her status as the Queen of Castile.

John's diplomatic powers were again called into play when he was sent north that summer to negotiate a renewal of the truce with the Scots. On 1 August, as he rode back south, his natural daughter, Blanche Morieux, was successfully petitioning the King for the pardon of a murderer. This is the last mention of her in the historical record, and sadly we must conclude that she died not long afterwards.

That August, Bishop Despenser's crusade ended in ignominious failure and an appalling loss of life — for which the Bishop would be impeached and stripped of his temporalities. The Council now belatedly recognised that John of Gaunt was the only man with the resources and prestige to deal with the French, and accordingly he was appointed King's Lieutenant in France and asked to prepare for a foray across the Channel to negotiate a truce with the enemy and salvage something of England's honour.

Katherine Swynford, meanwhile, had herself been petitioning the King, for on 20 October 1383, Richard granted a royal licence empowering her to enclose and empark three hundred acres of land and woods within the manor of Kettlethorpe. Again, the influence - direct or indirect - of John of Gaunt may be perceived, for the Duke was the man of the moment, deferred to by the majority, and the King, although increasingly jealous and resentful of him, could hardly gainsay such a request. Nevertheless, the patronage Richard extended to Katherine and her kinsfolk suggests he continued to think highly of her. The enclosing of a deer park usually meant the dispossession of tenant farmers, and often led to ill feeling. To Katherine, however, it meant a further improvement to the manor and her son's inheritance. As with her failure to drain her stretch of the Fosdyke, self-interest came before the consideration of others. It was an attitude typical of many mediaeval landowners.

The Duke moved a crucial step closer to his Spanish goal in November 1383, when, following the death of the pro-Castilian King Ferdinand, which plunged Portugal into dynastic war, the Anglophile Joao I, brother of the late monarch, was elected by a rebel faction to its contested throne. Joao, needing English help to enforce his sovereignty against the claims of Juan I of Castile (who was married to Ferdinand's daughter, a lady of doubtful legitimacy), was only too willing to offer his support for John of Gaunt's claim to Castile.

John returned from a mission to Scotland at the end of April 1384,

and arrived at Salisbury for what turned out to be a tumultuous session of Parliament, for Richard FitzAlan, Earl of Arundel, launched a fierce and entirely justified attack on the King and his favourites, provoking Richard publicly to insult him. John of Gaunt tried to pacify both of them, putting Arundel's concerns in more measured terms to the King, yet angering both Richard and the court party - never before had Richard's hostility to his uncle been so evident. It was at this juncture that a plot was hatched against the Duke, obviously with the intention of eliminating him entirely from the political scene.

The plot came to light when, in de Vere's chamber, a Carmelite friar called John Latimer was said to have privately warned the King that John of Gaunt had organised a widespread conspiracy and was planning to have him assassinated. With suspicious alacrity, Richard accepted this at face value. He confronted his uncle, lost his temper, accused him of plotting treason, and was ready to have him summarily executed without any investigation of the matter, but the Duke, with dignified conviction, protested his innocence and accused the King himself of working against his own life. Richard responded with an astonishing about-turn, ordering that the friar be put to death summarily, but the lords in Parliament persuaded him to have the man questioned before proceeding further. It never happened: a band of knights led by the King's half-brother, the hot-headed Sir John Holland, seized Latimer as he was being hauled off to prison, and had him tortured to death. Someone, clearly, didn't want the wretch betraying the origins of the plot.

Parliament erupted in fury, so the King hastened to dissolve it. He then had to deal with his youngest uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, who, brandishing his sword, furiously threatened to kill anyone, Richard included, who dared to accuse his brother Lancaster of treason. Deprived of the only witness, the case against John collapsed.

It looks very much as if the King and his favourites, especially Robert de Vere, were behind this attempt to overthrow John of Gaunt. Vere bitterly resented the Duke's influence, and had been playing on the King's jealousy of his uncle's dominance, urging him to shake it off and rule autonomously. At bottom, of course, Richard needed his uncle. Good relations were soon restored, at least on the surface and for the time being, and in June, John was again made King's Lieutenant in France and sent there to negotiate a renewal of the truce.

Katherine Swynford — like most people — would soon have learned what had happened at Salisbury, and the knowledge that her erstwhile lover and generous patron, the father of her children, had come so close to an ignoble death must have distressed her greatly. But this was not the only unpleasant event to affect Katherine in 1384. On 17 August, at Reading, a commission of oyer and terminer was issued following a complaint by her against no less a person than Robert de Saltby, the Mayor of Lincoln, and other named men of that city, including its bailiffs, John Prentys and John Shipman, for breaking into her close there, taking her goods and assaulting her servants. On 20 September, this time at Westminster, a similar commission was issued in respect of an attack on her close in Grantham by the same men and others.

Given the status of the attackers, this was no common assault by petty-minded people on a notorious woman of whose morals they disapproved: it was far more serious than that. And considering that Katherine had been living apart from John of Gaunt for more than three years now, it is highly unlikely to have been an expression of public outrage at her private life. No, these crimes were more likely to have been born out of angry resentment at Katherine's siding with the clergy in the ongoing conflict between the Bail and the cathedral close over the close's demand to be placed beyond the jurisdiction of the town authorities, a dispute that had simmered in Lincoln for some years, and would not be resolved until John of Gaunt ruled in 1390 and 1392 that the close was to enjoy immunity from the jurisdiction and demands of the Mayor and citizens — for which the jubilant canons gave him a gold image of his patron saint, John the Baptist, from the cathedral treasury. Katherine's strong links with the close would have placed her firmly on that side of the divide. The citizens were also resentful of the Duke's perceived encroachment, as constable of the castle, upon their liberties. And Katherine's failure to clear her stretch of the Fossdyke would have ruffled no few feathers amongst the burghers of the town; that same year of 1384, John of Gaunt presided over a commission that failed to address the problem effectively. Moreover, the Duke was known to be Katherine's patron still: it may have been that the canons had rented the Chancery to Katherine in a bid to win his support, and there were perhaps fears in the Bail that she influenced him unfairly in favour of the close and in respect of the Fossdyke. So these attacks, cunningly timed while he was abroad, were probably intended as a warning to Katherine not to involve herself — or try to prejudice her powerful protector — in the city's quarrels. Even so, they were an outrageous attack on her property, and a highly provocative intrusion in the cathedral close

that did not help the cause of the citizens in the long run.

We do not know if Katherine was in Lincoln when the Chancery was raided; the presence of her servants might suggest that she was, but she may have left a skeleton staff there in her absence. There or not, the assaults must have shaken her to the core, for if the Mayor himself was involved, what support could she look for in Lincoln outside the precincts of the close? It cannot have been pleasant knowing herself so hated. There is no record, however, of what happened to the perpetrators, nor of any further assaults on her property.

The second commission relating to these offences contains the only known reference to Katherine having property in Grantham. A close then meant an enclosed piece of land, usually beside a cathedral or other important building, and containing staff housing or offices, such as the Chancery in Lincoln. Thus her close was probably near St Wulfram's, the most important church in the town, and the hub around which it had grown; its soaring 282-foot spire was a landmark for miles around. The house she owned here was almost certainly one of several ancient mansions that once stood in this area, and may have been of equal status to Grantham House in Castlegate, which survives today. Grantham House was originally a stone hall house built around 1380 in what was then a rural area near the church; it still stands in twenty-seven acres of gardens on the banks of the River Witham. Its mediaeval core is now hidden beneath sixteenth- and eighteenth-century additions and alterations. From the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, this house was known as Hall Place, after the wealthy family of merchants that lived there; prior to that, it was apparently owned by the Htzwilliarns. Both Margaret Tudor, Queen of Scots, and Cardinal Wolsey stayed here in the sixteenth century. The original Grantham House appears to have been of a similar type to the properties that Katherine Swynford leased in Lincoln, and probably exemplifies the kind of house she had in Grantham.

These were perilous times. In February 1385, Robert de Vere - with the connivance of the King — made a second attempt to bring down John of Gaunt, hatching yet another court plot to kill him at a tournament. On the 24th, an outraged John, accompanied by an armed escort and wearing a breastplate, confronted Richard II at Sheen, lecturing him 'with some harshness and severity' on the folly of relying on bad counsel. Early the next month the Princess Joan intervened to bring about a public reconciliation, while John's former adversary, William Courtenay, now Archbishop of Canterbury, censured the King for the way in which he had behaved towards the

Duke, and condemned his evil advisers - at which Richard had to be restrained from running the Archbishop through with his sword and transforming him into a second Thomas a Becket. Both John of Gaunt and Courtenay had voiced the increasingly widespread concern about the King's favourites, and Richard's reaction shows how unwilling he was to listen to measured criticism. His resentment of his uncle had now reached boiling point. Yet these days John's priorities were focused not on maintaining political supremacy in England, but on Castile, as the prospect of a crown there became daily more viable. In April, an English force was finally dispatched overseas to the aid of Joao I, who that month — after prolonged resistance to the forces of Castile — was once more defiantly proclaimed King of Portugal.

John spent the summer accompanying Richard II on a lacklustre invasion of Scotland, having first lavishly entertained the King and Queen at Leicester Castle. During this campaign, John's brothers, Edmund and Thomas, were created Duke of York and Duke of Gloucester respectively. While they were all up north, tidings came of the death of the Princess Joan on 8 August at Wallingford. Her end was perhaps hastened by the news that her son the King intended to proceed against his half-brother, Sir John Holland, for the murder of the heir of the Earl of Stafford, but Walsingham tells us that the Princess, who had spent a life 'devoted to pleasure', was 'so fat from eating that she could scarcely walk'; it may be that her obesity, as well as stress, had predisposed her to a heart attack. Joan was buried beside her first husband, Sir Thomas Holland, in the church of the Grey Friars at Stamford, some five months after her passing, in the presence of the King; Chaucer was a mourner, having received black cloth for the occasion from the royal Wardrobe, while John of Gaunt must have sincerely mourned the loss of this dear sister-in-law who had been such a stalwart friend to him.

At the end of August 1385, as he returned to his estates in the Midlands, John received the most exciting and encouraging news: King Joao, his army boosted by English troops, had won a magnificent victory over his enemies at Aljubarrota on 14 August, and was now the unchallenged sovereign of Portugal. The Duke was jubilant, for the way was at last clear for Joao to offer him the support he needed for his Castilian venture. Late in November 1385, John appealed to Parliament to vote the necessary funds for an invasion of Castile by means of 'the way of Portugal', and Parliament - in which his son Henry was sitting for the first time — at last responded favourably.

There is evidence that John of Gaunt was in contact with Katherine

Swynford at this time, the first on record since he had sent her wine in 1382. During the November Parliament, the Duke petitioned for the removal of Sir John Stanley from the manors of Lathom and Knowsley in Lancashire. Sir John had recently married Isabel, the daughter of Sir Thomas Lathom; upon Lathom's death in 1370, those manors had passed to his heir, another Sir Thomas, who died underage in 1383. Because Thomas had been a minor, John of Gaunt, as his feudal lord, had taken him and his manors into wardship, and although Isabel was her brother's heiress, her husband had taken possession of Lathom and Knowsley on Thomas's death without first establishing his right to do so in the Duke's palatine chancery. There was, of course, more to this than met the eye: Sir John Stanley, who became Robert de Vere's deputy in Ireland the following year, appears to have been a client of the favourite, and almost certainly de Vere was behind this slight to the Duke and upheld Stanley's possession of the manors in Parliament.

But the law was on the Duke's side. After John of Gaunt complained that Stanley had been in 'grave contempt' of his ducal rights, Parliament decreed that Stanley's entry into the manors had been illegal and ordered him to vacate them and to lodge his claim in the palatine chancery. In the end, John of Gaunt was just. He had vindicated his right to the manors, but he was aware that they should pass to Stanley in right of his wife. So he granted them to Katherine Swynford, who in turn, at his behest, sold them to Stanley. The Duke even returned to Stanley a substantial part of the price. Thus we have evidence that John and Katherine were in contact, indeed, in collaboration, at this time, and that she was willing to support him in such matters.

The King, eager to get rid of his troublesome uncle, now lent him money for his Castilian venture, and from January 1386, preparations for the great invasion went ahead.

'The Lady of Kettlethorpe'

Nearly five years on from the end of their affair, Katherine could perhaps view the prospect of John leaving England for a long period with equanimity. After all, it would not be forever - there is some evidence to suggest that he never intended to take up permanent residence in Castile, but anticipated that England would remain his chief base.¹ Thus their children would not be permanently deprived of a father, nor Katherine of the occasional contact with him.

Inwardly, she might have worried about John, for he was no longer young. Fernao Lopes, whose description of him as he appeared in Portugal in 1386-7 may derive from the reminiscences of Philippa of Lancaster and other contemporaries, says he was still tall, lean and upright, but estimated him to be 'about sixty years old, with fewer white hairs than is normal for one of his age' - unsurprisingly, as he was still only forty-six. It does appear, though, that a lifetime of care and campaigning had prematurely aged him, and his experiences in Spain would doubtless leave their mark as well.

The Duke spent the months prior to his departure putting his affairs in order, and his provision extended to Katherine's family. He took Thomas Chaucer into his service.² He betrothed nine-year-old Joan Beaufort to Sir Robert Ferrers of Willisham, heir through his mother to the Boteler estates in Wem.³ And on 19 February, on the day after the standard of the Cross was raised in St Paul's Cathedral and his Castilian venture was preached as a crusade, he was in Lincoln.

John was there to attend an impressive ceremony in the chapter house of Lincoln Cathedral, in which, in the presence of nine canons, 'the Lord Henry, Earl of Derby, son of the Lord John, the most high Prince, King of Castile and Duke of Lancaster' was to be admitted by Bishop Buckingham to the cathedral's confraternity, just as John himself had been admitted at the age of three. Alongside Henry, John Beaufort, now about thirteen and already knighted, Sir Thomas Swynford, Philippa Chaucer and Sir Robert Ferrers were also made members. Sir Thomas Swynford, in company with another Lincolnshire knight, Sir William Hauley, was officially in attendance on the Duke that day.⁴

The inclusion of Katherine's sons, her sister and her future son-in-law in this important Lancastrian ceremony demonstrates how highly regarded, and how important, she and her family were within the Duke's closest circle.

Admission to the cathedral's 'order of the brotherhood' — which it claimed had been founded 'when the Bible was written', but which in fact dated from c.1185 — was a socially prestigious privilege that enabled members of the laity to benefit from the prayers of the clergy in perpetuity, and to be buried in the cathedral; in return, it was piously hoped, they would be generous benefactors and patrons.⁸ The Duke no doubt felt that he and those dear to him needed such intercessions at this crucial time. His visit to Lincoln Cathedral would have afforded him the opportunity to pray at the three altars where his name-saints were worshipped, and to the Holy Virgin, to whom the church was dedicated.

After the ceremony, wine and comfits were served, then the company repaired to the castle for a feast hosted by the Duke.¹⁰ Professor Goodman is probably correct in suggesting that John made this auspicious day the occasion for a farewell gathering prior to his departure. And with the focus on two of her sons, her sister, her former charge and her patron, there can be little doubt that Katherine Swynford, whose house was nearby, was also present with her other children. Nor that her long association with the cathedral, and the omission of her name from the list of new members of its confraternity, suggest that she herself already belonged to it, and perhaps had done for some years, for Sir Hugh Swynford may also have been a member.

Philippa Chaucer's admission suggests that she was still resident in Lincolnshire at this time and living apart from her husband. She was probably preparing to go to Castile in the train of the Duchess Constance: after all, her son Thomas was going with the Duke, and with her daughter in a convent and her husband living apart from her, there was little to keep her in England.

John of Gaunt returned to London immediately after the ceremony; his Duchess was then away on a pilgrimage to various shrines, praying for the success of her husband's great enterprise. She can hardly be blamed for not attending the ceremony in Lincoln, at which the Swynford connections were so prominent." Instead, she was received into the confraternity of St Albans Abbey, home of the chronicler Walsingham, a place where she was much admired for her piety,

which might account in part for Walsingham's past hostility towards the Duke.

On 8 March, Richard II formally recognised John of Gaunt as King of Castile, placing him next to himself at the council table. At Easter, the Pope again proclaimed the enterprise a crusade, and sent John a holy banner. By then, the Duke had begun assembling his fleet, and there was a ceremony of farewell at court, with the King and Queen solemnly placing golden diadems on the heads of John and Constance. After that, John departed on his own pilgrimage to various shrines in the West Country. On 8 April, as King of Castile, he agreed a treaty of perpetual friendship with Richard II, and on the 20th, the King ordered the impressing of every ship in the realm for John's fleet.

By 14 June, the Duke had arrived in Plymouth; four days later, his fleet was finally assembled. Preoccupied as he was with the myriad aspects of his venture, he yet had to find time to deal with the unseemly conduct of his strong-willed daughter, Elizabeth of Lancaster. Bored with her child husband, who was still only fourteen to her twenty-three years, Elizabeth had willingly allowed herself to be seduced by the King's half-brother, Sir John Holland, a volatile schemer who in 1384 had been involved in the plot hatched against John of Gaunt at the Salisbury Parliament; it was he who in 1385 had caused outrage - and grief to his mother, the Princess Joan — by killing Stafford's son, as a result of which he had been forced to flee to sanctuary until the King's wrath abated. Holland was licentious too, and around 1380, he had reputedly enjoyed a torrid affair with the flirtatious Isabella of Castile, Constance's sister and the wife of Edmund of Langley. Now, Higden says, he had been 'struck down passionately' by his love for Elizabeth of Lancaster, 'so that day and night he sought her out'.

When John of Gaunt learned that Elizabeth was pregnant by Holland, he arranged for her unconsummated marriage to Pembroke to be annulled; that unfortunate boy was to remarry, but he would die horribly, pierced through his genitals, in a jousting accident at Christmas 1389. On 24 June 1386, Elizabeth and Holland were hastily wed in or near Plymouth, narrowly averting a scandal and effecting his complete rehabilitation. The Duke was to show great favour to this son-in-law, so obviously the scoundrel had charm and ability. The couple's daughter Constance was born the following year, and four other children — the eldest being named John, after the Duke - would follow.

Clearly the headstrong Elizabeth had inherited her father's sensual nature; it may have seemed to her that there was no harm in following the example set by her former governess Katherine Swynford in giving herself outside marriage to the man she loved. But Katherine was not a princess of the blood - Elizabeth was, and the corruption of her virtue was a more serious matter. It seems that Katherine had failed, by precedent or precept, to impress upon Elizabeth the need for a girl in her position to conduct herself virtuously. Fortunately, her father had dealt with her leniently and advantageously, and her marriage turned out to be successful.

In July 1386, the Duke's retinue began to embark. Having appointed his son Henry to serve as Warden of the Palatinate of Lancaster during his absence, John entertained him to a farewell dinner on board his flagship on the 8th. The following day, a fair wind sprang up; father and son bade each other a hasty farewell, and the fleet set sail on its glorious venture. With it went the Duke's three daughters, his sons-in-law John Holland, who had been appointed constable of his army, and Sir Thomas Morieux, serving as marshal; Thomas Chaucer and probably his mother Philippa; and the Duchess Constance, now in high hopes of occupying her father's throne and continuing his dynasty.

For Constance was possibly pregnant at this time, with a child doubtless conceived primarily for dynastic purposes. The arrival of a male heir on Castilian soil would signify divine approval of her cause and inspire the loyalty of her subjects. It would also serve to proclaim that she and her husband were fully reconciled, and go some way towards obliterating the scandal of his former life. Alas, the child — if there was a child at all - was not of the desired sex: the contemporary chronicler Monk of St Denis says that the Duchess was delivered of a daughter soon after she and the Duke disembarked at Corunna on 25 July. No further mention is made of the infant, so either she did not live, or the Monk's information was inaccurate and she never existed.

Katherine Swynford was probably living quietly in Lincolnshire when John went away - she was still renting the Chancery in 1386-7, for at that time she was having repairs done to the house. Perhaps she went to the cathedral and offered up prayers for the success of the Duke's enterprise, as Bishop Buckingham requested of his flock on 28 July. There is later evidence to suggest that she and John were in touch while he was abroad, so probably at some stage she and her Beaufort children received word of his arrival in Compostela and his decision to winter in Galicia before attempting to take Castile. In his absence, she

busied herself with domestic matters and continued to administer her son's lands. In 1386, Henry de Fenton granted Katherine tenements in Kettlethorpe, further improving the Swynford inheritance.

Katherine cannot have seen much of her brother-in-law, Geoffrey Chaucer, these days; maybe, with Philippa possibly gone overseas, they now had little to say to each other. Chaucer did not fare well after the Duke's departure. In 1386, he was a man of substance and status, and in the summer of that year he was nominated to sit in Parliament as Knight of the Shire for Kent, taking his seat in October. But towards the end of the year, he either resigned from, or was deprived of, his lucrative controllerships, and he gave up - or was evicted from — his house in Aldgate. He possibly took lodgings in Greenwich or Deptford, but his only income now was his royal pension, which he continued to collect himself twice a year from the Exchequer.

The loss of his house and offices coming only months after John of Gaunt's departure argues that they had indeed been granted to him through the Duke's influence. But the absent John was now *persona non grata* in England, for the King was relieved to be rid of his too-powerful and intimidating uncle, and his favourite Robert de Vere now reigned triumphant at court. This might explain why Chaucer - whose wife was sister to the Duke's former mistress — had lost his offices and would not regain favour until Richard realised just how much he needed John of Gaunt's support.

Meanwhile, the Duke had met up with his ally, Joao I of Portugal, and both were trying to enforce John's claims through diplomacy before resorting to war. To cement their friendship, Philippa of Lancaster was given in marriage to King Joao in February 1387 in Oporto Cathedral.

Philippa was to prove a model — and much-loved — queen consort. She was devoted and obedient to her husband, bore him eight children (two were named after her parents; another was the great explorer prince, Henry the Navigator), had them well educated, and set a deeply pious and charitable example. In every way she was a credit to her father, and also to Katherine Swynford, who had been in overall charge of her from the time Philippa was thirteen, and who had evidently succeeded with her where she had failed with her sister. And it was perhaps Philippa's fondness for Katherine and the Beauforts that led her to treat her husband's bastard children with kindness and tolerance.

It was probably before his departure that Katherine had lent John a substantial sum of money. The Pope had promised special remission of sins to those who helped finance the Duke's 'crusade', so Katherine, mindful of her former life, was perhaps laying up treasure in Heaven. The fact that she had such funds to lend is further testimony to her financial acumen - it will be remembered that John himself had entrusted her with large sums of money for the maintenance of his daughters, and we know she was careful with her income, and prudent in providing for the future. But when the Duke was in need, she did not hesitate to assist him liberally, showing herself selflessly sympathetic to his cause, even though it took him away from her. John did not forget her generosity, and on 16 February 1387, he sent instructions to his receiver in Yorkshire to repay £100 (£33,471) in part repayment of the 500 marks (£41,058) she had loaned him 'in his great necessity'. We might infer from this that he and Katherine were maintaining some kind of contact while he was abroad: the interests of their children alone would surely have necessitated it.

In the spring of 1387, diplomatic solutions having failed, the Duke took Galicia, and at the end of March he and King Joao invaded Leon, a kingdom ruled by Juan I of Castile. But things did not go well — there were complaints that the Duke's womenfolk slowed down the march; his son-in-law, Sir Thomas Morieux, died, worn out by fighting; and the Castilians had laid waste the land, so that countless men and horses died of starvation, dysentery and heat exhaustion. 'These are the fortunes of war,' observed Froissart. 'The Duke was at his wits' end, and weighed down by anxiety. He saw his men exhausted and ill and taking to their beds, while he himself felt so weary that he lay in his bed without moving.' John nearly died too, but forced himself to get up and look cheerful, for the sake of maintaining morale among his men. Nevertheless, there was much muttering about his leadership of the campaign, even though the Count of Foix thought John had 'conducted himself valiantly and wisely in this war', and soon King Joao began urging him to abandon the fighting in favour of a return to diplomacy.³⁴ But the Duke refused.

On 26—27 March 1387, Richard II and Anne of Bohemia visited Lincoln, to be admitted to the confraternity of the cathedral. It is hard to conceive that Katherine, probably a member herself, was not among the congregation that witnessed this ceremony. Richard II thought highly of her, and may well have singled her out on that day, because the following month, he appointed 'Lady Katherine de Swynfbrd' a Lady of the Garter (or, more correctly, a 'Lady of the

Fraternity of St George and of the Society of the Garter'), the highest English honour to which a woman might aspire. Her formal robes of scarlet wool embroidered with blue taffeta garters in gold, with the motto *Honi soit qui mal y pense* in blue silk, and a matching hood, were paid for by the King the following August.

In 1387, Katherine would have gone to the glittering court at Windsor, donned her robes, participated in the Garter ceremonies with the other ten ladies of the order, and attended the great feast hosted by the King on St George's Day. Doubtless she met up with many people she had known during her glory days with the Duke, but Katherine could now hold her head up at court in the knowledge that she was there in an honourable and legitimate capacity. Even so, her admission to the most prestigious order of knighthood in Europe was probably a tacit acknowledgement by the King of her special relationship with John of Gaunt, and of her influence with him. It might also indicate that the scandal surrounding their affair had died down and that people knew they were no longer lovers.

Edward III had begun the practice of appointing 'Dames of the Fraternity' with Queen Philippa and his eldest daughter Isabella, but since the beginning of his reign, Richard II had been assiduous in admitting ladies to the order, notably his mother Joan of Kent, the Duchess Constance, her sister Isabella, and Philippa and Elizabeth of Lancaster in 1378-9, and Queen Anne, Catalina of Lancaster, Eleanor de Bohun and Lady Mohun in 1384. So Katherine Swynford was in august company. But there was an ulterior motive for her advancement. By 1387, Richard was engaged in a bitter struggle with those lords who resented his reliance on worthless favourites like Robert de Vere and his former tutor Sir Simon Burley, and were demanding a new push to win the war with France: Richard had never yet led an army into the field — an abrogation of his duty, in the eyes of his martially minded magnates — and was essentially inclined to peace. That summer, Parliament itself was to demand that he remove his offensive counsellors. Richard had therefore come to a belated realisation of how loyally John of Gaunt had supported him; he knew how much John cared for Katherine, and making her a Lady of the Garter was one way in which he could show favour to his uncle and solicit his support; this would not be the first time he had promoted ladies to the order to forge useful alliances with his nobles.³⁷ It is probably no coincidence too that Chaucer's fortunes now began to improve: in July, he was sent to Calais on the King's service, and in August he was acting as a justice of the peace at Dartford in Kent — more sops to the Duke perhaps.

But John had far more pressing matters on his mind. His campaign in Leon had ended cruelly in dysentery, mass desertions and disaster, he had failed to rally sufficient Iberian backing for his cause, and he now saw that there was no prospect of him ever taking Castile. His army, encamped on an open plain in the burning sun, was decimated by the bloody flux. You must believe that the Duke of Lancaster was not without trouble night or day, for he was sorely ill, and his valiant knights dead. He sorrowed for them and cried (if one can say so) every day, and took everything to heart.⁴⁰ To make matters worse, King Joao fell seriously ill and nearly died, as a result of which his distraught bride, Philippa of Lancaster, suffered a miscarriage. Their recovery was seen as little more than a miracle.

One of those who perished of dysentery in Leon may have been Philippa Chaucer. On 18 June 1387, Geoffrey collected her annuity as usual from the Exchequer, but on 7 November, when the next instalment was due, he fetched only his own pension. Nor did he ever pick up any more payments to Philippa. Since the usual reason for disappearing from these records was death, the assumption must be that she died between 18 June and 17 November 1387.

It has been suggested that a stone effigy of a mediaeval lady that was discovered in the nineteenth century beneath the floor of the church of St Mary the Virgin at Old Worldham in Hampshire is that of Philippa Chaucer. This claim is based on the evidence of a brooch, or 'fermail', on the breast of the figure, which is said to display a Roët wheel. However, the design bears very little resemblance to that emblem, and in fact is common to such brooches. The costume, moreover, is that of the first half of the thirteenth century (when the church was built), not the last quarter of the fourteenth.

Of course, Philippa could have died in Lincolnshire and been buried there, perhaps at Kettlethorpe — that is the traditional version - or even in Lincoln Cathedral, to which she was entitled as a member of its confraternity. It has also been suggested that she returned to Hainault and spent the rest of her life there, having inherited property in that region. But the most credible theory is that she accompanied Constance to Spain and died there, which would account for there being no record of her death in England and no known tomb. If she did succumb to dysentery in the heat of Leon, she was probably buried in a pit with other victims, with scant ceremony and no memorial.

Wherever Philippa died, Katherine had lost her sister, and she must have mourned her sincerely: they had evidently been close in recent

yeen, living often in the same household. There is no record of their mutual bereavement bringing Chaucer and Katherine closer together: their lives seem hardly to have coincided for a long time afterwards. For Geoffrey, who never made any reference to his wife's death in his verse, there must have been feelings of regret, but his loss did not (diminish his cynicism regarding marriage — far from it, as his later poems show. Nor would he 'fall of wedding in the trap' again.

It was now painfully obvious that John of Gaunt's long-cherished dream of winning the throne of Castile was never going to come to fruition.

Finally accepting this, he agreed terms with King Juan I, and at Trancoso, in July 1387, a settlement was proposed whereby, in return for a cash payment of £100,000 (£33,470,817) and an annual pension of £6,666 (£2,231,165), John and Constance would relinquish their Castilian claims to their fifteen-year-old daughter Catalina and enter into negotiations for her marriage to Juan's son Enrique.

Just before John of Gaunt concluded the peace with Juan I, he made an emotional promise to the Virgin Mary to amend his way of life, and was seen weeping in repentance for his sins. This echoed the public avowal he had made in 1381, and begs the question whether or not he had lapsed into his old promiscuous ways. But given how ill and weak he was at this time, that is unlikely. Was he referring to Katherine Swynford? Although he had been abroad for over a year, he was perhaps still carrying the proverbial torch for her, and might have maintained contact between them, thereby affronting his wife. If so, that contact can only have been intermittent: that summer, there were alarming rumours in England, but they were just that, for even Walsingham had no idea of what was really happening in Spain; that the Duke's army had suffered terrible losses was known, but some were claiming that the hot weather had 'induced deadly plague'.⁴⁸ We can only imagine what Katherine and her children would have felt if they heard that.

That same month, a Castilian assassin's attempt to murder John and Constance by poison left them shaken and demoralised; the man confessed and was burned to death, apparently on the Duke's orders. In August, John was well enough to accompany King Joao to Portugal; at Oporto, the next month, after confirming a treaty of friendship with Portugal that still holds good today, and is England's most ancient alliance, John took his leave of his daughter and son-in-law, and

sailed with Constance to Bayonne; he would never again set eyes on Philippa, and parting from her must have been a wrench, for she had married at the unusually late age of twenty-seven, having remained in her father's care for far longer than most daughters of her caste, and there was obviously a close bond between them.

On 26 May 1388, Richard II appointed John King's Lieutenant in Aquitaine, and for the next eighteen months the Duke would remain in the south of France, ruling the Duchy. At Bayonne, in 1389, he received Thomas Chaucer into his retinue, retaining him for life at an annual fee of £10 (£5,102), and appointed him Constable of Knaresborough Castle. From now on Thomas Chaucer's fortunes would be closely linked to those of the House of Lancaster.

On 8 July 1388, John of Gaunt and Juan I concluded the Treaty of Bayonne, which confirmed the proposals made at Trancoso, and in September, Catalina, now sixteen, tall, fair and very beautiful, was married to the Infante Enrique, the nine-year-old heir to Castile, at Fuentarrabia; she became Queen of Castile when he succeeded as Enrique III in October 1390. One of the witnesses to the treaty, unusually, was the Duke's long-serving physician, Lewis Recouchez, whose presence has led several historians to wonder if John was still unwell as a result of the rigours of the campaign.

After the wedding, with the crown of Castile irrevocably beyond their reach, and their only child royally married, John and Constance no longer needed each other, and appear to have abandoned all pretence of marital unity. From now on, they would effectively live apart. She was of no further political importance to him, and accordingly there are few further references to her in the chronicles. The Duke continued to provide generously for her, but there was to be no more pretence of marital felicity.

For Constance, the abandonment of her cherished hopes must have been hard to bear. In October, she went to visit her daughter and new son-in-law in Castile, where she had her father's remains exhumed from the field of Montiel and honourably reburied with his ancestors. She tried to persuade King Juan to use his influence to end the Great Schism, which had left one Pope in Avignon and another in Rome, and also worked to foster good relations between her husband the Duke and the House of Trastamara.

Constance would not return to England until the following year, and then she would live mainly at Tutbury, dissociating herself once more

from the Lancastrian household and the court, and surrounding herself with her Castilian ladies and gentlemen.⁰⁰ Her withdrawal would leave the way clear for the relationship between the Duke and Katherine Swynford to flourish once more.

Meanwhile, England had descended into political turmoil. Those magnates who opposed the rule of Richard II — who styled themselves the Lords Appellant — had finally had their way and purged the royal household of his favourites, reminding the King that he was still a minor and forcing him to accept councillors of their own choosing. Richard retaliated by having Parliament declare their actions unlawful and treasonable, but he was no match for the might of the lords. In November 1387, three of the Appellants - Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and the Earls of Arundel and Warwick — angrily accused Robert de Vere and the King's other favourites of treason, and on 20 December, Henry of Derby, who with Thomas Mowbray had lately joined the Appellants, defeated de Vere in a skirmish at Radcot Bridge and was hailed as a hero. Afterwards, de Vere fled into exile, never to return. (In 1392, he was fatally savaged by a boar whilst hunting at Louvain.) By this point, matters had reached such a crisis that for a few days in late December, Richard II, now a captive in the Tower, was effectively deposed.

It was against this background — and possibly as a result of the Duke and Duchess going their separate ways in the autumn - that at Christmas 1387, Katherine Swynford and her daughter Joan Beaufort were invited to stay in Mary de Bohun's household. Mary and her husband had finally been assigned their own establishment and begun cohabiting in November 1385, and in August or September 1387, at Monmouth Castle (which John of Gaunt had placed at their disposal), Mary had given birth to their first surviving son, called Henry after his father. Again Katherine had been invited to attend Mary after the birth of a child, which suggests that Mary and her husband placed much confidence in the older woman's capabilities; it might also be that the young Derbys were acquiescing to a request made by the Duke that Katherine come to her, or they might have invited her to please him. Even so, she would not have been admitted to their household unless Henry of Derby regarded her as fit company for his wife; he seems to have long cherished an affection and regard for Katherine, and perhaps felt that her exceptional qualities more than outweighed her tarnished reputation; and there is evidence that he liked her children too. Henry may have shared with his father a sentimental appreciation of Katherine's links with Blanche of Lancaster; she had probably been more of a stepmother to him than

Constance ever had, and in later years, as will be seen, he was to refer to her as his mother.

Henry of Derby was now twenty, a squat and powerfully built young man, always richly and elegantly garbed, and handsome, with russet-red hair and beard, as were seen when his tomb was opened in 1831. People were impressed by his courtesy, chivalry and affability. Fearless and brave, he was conventional in outlook, staunch and orthodox in his religious views, and had wide-based interests embracing jousting, crusading, literature, poetry and music. Ambitious and restless, he had a thirst for adventure, but he could be a devious and calculating opportunist, who was also indecisive and thick-skinned. On the positive side, he was careful, cautious, serious, even-tempered and generous. The Duke was exceptionally proud of his son, delighted in his military prowess, and demonstrated great affection towards him. Obviously there was a strong bond between them.

Although they had the use of Monmouth Castle and a London house in Bishopsgate, the young couple may have been staying at this time at Kenilworth, which John of Gaunt had also made available to them. By Christmas, Mary had prevailed on Katherine and Joan to join her household, and during the festival she presented them both with gowns of silk in her livery colours of red and white, edged with miniver. Again, it may be that Mary was acting on John of Gaunt's instructions; she must have known that he would approve of her receiving Katherine into her chamber.

Thus Katherine came to occupy a place of honour in another royal household. Her duties, as with Blanche of Lancaster, probably involved attending upon the young Countess and helping to look after her rapidly growing family, starting with the infant Henry of Monmouth; yet, given her experience in running a large establishment, she may have enjoyed a more managerial role. Ten-year-old Joan would probably have helped with the Derbys' children, and would have benefited intellectually and socially from being placed in a lordly household; she grew up literate, cultivated and pious, and must therefore have received a good education that befitted her to move with confidence in courtly circles. It is clear, though, that Katherine - like her sister Philippa and other *damoiselles* in royal households — divided her time between waiting on her young mistress and her personal and family commitments in Lincolnshire, where she continued to rent the Chancery and to look after the Swynford holdings.

Katherine and Joan's presence in Mary de Bohun's household testifies to their continuing inclusion in the Lancastrian inner circle. When Mary was appointed a Lady of the Garter in April 1388, Katherine was again provided with Garter robes and once more travelled to Windsor for the St George's Day solemnities and feasting. Mary was then pregnant again, and in September 1388 she bore a second son, Thomas, who was speedily followed by a third, John, in June 1389 — Henry of Derby did not spare his young wife. However, their marriage appears to have been happy, with the couple sharing a love of chess, dogs, parrots and music (Mary, who came from a cultivated family, played the harp and cithar, Henry the recorder), and he was conspicuously faithful and assiduous in sending gifts of food to satisfy his wife's cravings during pregnancy. Theirs must have been a happy and lively household, and Katherine is again recorded in it at Christmas 1388, further evidence of her enduring association with the Derbys.

In February 1388, in what became known as the Merciless Parliament, the Lords Appellant had had five of the King's remaining favourites tried and convicted, and his beloved Simon Burley executed. For more than a year afterwards, Richard endured in humiliating tutelage to the Appellants, until in May 1389, now twenty-two, he belatedly declared himself of full age, dismissed them and asserted his regal authority. In September, Henry of

Derby — ostensibly forgiven — was restored to the Council: Richard knew he needed the support of John of Gaunt, who had remained in Aquitaine to conclude a new truce with the French. That year, 1389, Richard had again issued Katherine Swynford with Garter robes; he also created the Duke's son-in-law, John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon, and appointed him Chamberlain of England, Admiral of the Western Fleet and a privy councillor. Richard now wanted — needed - his powerful uncle in England. After more than three years abroad, John of Gaunt had begun making plans for his return home, but on 30 October, the impatient King — who had already sent funds for his voyage — formally summoned him back. The ship carrying the Duke docked at Plymouth on 19 November 1389. He came home far wealthier than before, 'with an immense sum of gold treasure', but prematurely aged - a French councillor referred to him at this time as 'an old black boar' - and probably in poorer health. From Devon, he journeyed eastwards, obeying the royal summons, and in December, paying his uncle a great honour, the King rode out two miles from Reading to greet him and gave him the kiss of peace with enthusiastic warmth. He even removed John's Lancastrian livery collar of linked

S's and placed it about his own neck, symbolising his intention to be a good lord to the Duke and 'the good love heartfully felt between them'. In return, John would have the King's white hart badge incorporated into his SS collars.

With past differences forgotten, an atmosphere of conciliation pervaded the Council meeting that the Duke attended at Reading on 10 December; on the 12th he was at Westminster, where he received an unexpectedly warm welcome from the Mayor and Corporation of London, before attending services of thanksgiving for his return in Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral,⁷ where he no doubt paid his respects at Blanche's tomb. By Christmas, he was back at Hertford Castle.

On 21 January 1390, John of Gaunt and Thomas of Woodstock were finally appointed to the Council. John's return to the political scene in England ushered in an era of greater political stability and order. The King was now happy to place great trust and confidence in him, and anxious to work with him to promote peace with France. He promised his uncle he would listen to good counsel and bestow his patronage more wisely than in the past. For his part, the Duke proved moderate and staunchly loyal, acting as a peace-broker between the King and the former Appellants, and as a buttress to the throne he so honoured, and slipping effortlessly into the role of elder statesman, 'the most sufficient person in the realm'. No longer was he so hated by the people, for time had proved their fears of his ambitions groundless. Even Walsingham had nothing but praise for him.

Richard II's desire to retain his uncle's goodwill is evident in the honours he bestowed on him soon after his return: on 16 February 1390, he entailed palatinate powers with the Duchy of Lancaster on John and his heirs in perpetuity, whereas Edward III had granted these powers for life only. And in March, in the face of heated opposition to the Duchy being alienated from the Crown, he created John Duke of Aquitaine (or Guienne) for life, the King and Queen themselves ceremonially bestowing the ducal circlets on John and Constance. From now on, John would be known as 'Monseigneur de Guienne'.

With his return to political prominence in England, the Duke now sought a London residence of his own. The ruins of the Savoy still lay blackened and stark on the Strand, a reminder to all of what he had lost, and he had no plans to rebuild it. But by 1391, thanks no doubt to the good offices of his friend John Fordham, Bishop of Ely since

1388, he leased Ely Place in the fashionable suburb of Holborn, a property that Katherine Swynford would come to know well, for it was to remain John's London house for the rest of his life.

Since 1286, Ely Place (or the Bishop of Ely's Inn, as it was known) had been the London residence of the bishops of Ely. It occupied the area between Leather Lane, Charterhouse Street and what is now Holborn Circus, and thus traversed modern Hatton Garden; it was therefore very conveniently situated for Westminster and the City of London. There had been a building on the site since the sixth century, and parts of the walls that survive today date from the 1100s, being eight feet thick. To the north of the palace site is Bleeding Heart Yard, the name of which has nothing to do with John of Gaunt but commemorates a murder in 1626; and to the west is Ely Court, where lies the Mitre Tavern, founded in 1546. In 1327, John of Gaunt's mother, Philippa of Hainault, had lodged at Ely Place upon her arrival in England.

Rebuilt by Bishop Thomas Arundel between 1373 and 1388 above the remains of the older house, the property leased by John of Gaunt was a large and imposing palace with 'commodious rooms'; it was set in extensive gardens that were famous in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for their roses and strawberries, the latter being mentioned in Shakespeare's *Richard III*; there was also a vineyard. A massive stone gatehouse adorned with the Bishop's arms fronted the street.

Within the palace complex (and now adjoining Bleeding Heart Yard) was the bishops' magnificent private chapel, dedicated to the Saxon St Etheldreda, founded in 1251 and completed around 1300; a Catholic church since the 1870s, it was extensively rebuilt both before and after suffering severe bomb damage during the Second World War, but the crypt with its massive walls and pillars, stone floor and original twelfth-century black-beamed ceiling survives from John of Gaunt's time, as do the east and west thirteenth-century windows, although their glass is modern; it was here that the Duke and his household — and Katherine, in time — worshipped. This is all that is left of the great palace.

Opposite Ely Place, in Chancery Lane, was the town house of John Buckingham, Bishop of Lincoln, who knew John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford well. In 1391, the signatures of the Duke and the Bishop headed a petition by local residents demanding that Parliament put a stop to the slaughtering of animals and the dumping of offal near their houses. John's brothers, the Dukes of York and Gloucester,

visited him at Ely Place in October 1392, when all three received gifts of money from the citizens of London.

Katherine herself is absent from the records dating from the period immediately following John's return to England. She was still renting the Chancery in 1391-2, and remained responsible for Kettlethorpe and Coleby, so we must presume that she was mainly resident in Lincolnshire at this time. But there is plenty of evidence to show that the Duke was now busying himself with planning the futures of their children, and it would not be surprising if he were in contact with Katherine in this respect at least.

Although John always treated the Beauforts as cherished members of his family circle, he was concerned to ensure that his provision for them did not conflict with the interests of his legitimate heirs and would not make inroads into the Lancastrian inheritance. Instead of creating a land base for his bastards, he was to find other forms of income and preferment for them, through careful marriages and the Church, and in this way he avoided all cause for jealousy between his various offspring. Indeed, there is much evidence to show that the Beauforts were held in great affection and esteem by their half-siblings, and by Henry of Derby in particular. And not only by them, for the King himself, anxious to cement his ties with John of Gaunt, and also, it seems, moved by affection, was to show much favour to his Beaufort cousins.

In January 1390 and January 1391, young Henry Beaufort, who was probably no more than fifteen years old, but who was already destined for the Church — a traditional way of providing for bastard sons — was given the respective wealthy prebends of Thame and Sutton in the diocese of Lincoln; in August 1390, he was also assigned the prebend of Riccall in the diocese of York. It was not unheard of for one so young to be granted church offices, and these benefices would have provided for Henry's maintenance and education. 'His father the Duke sent him to Oxford' to study civil and canon law, and in the academic year 1390-1 he was a scholar at Queen's College, Oxford, having already undertaken some studies at Peterhouse, Cambridge, in 1388-9, when he was only about thirteen. As his later career would prove, he was a precocious child of above-average ability and intelligence. The Duke took a keen interest in his education, and must have visited him more than once at Queen's College, as a payment in the college accounts of 30s. (£415) 'for wine for the Duke of Lancaster' testifies; he also had wine sent to 'Master Henry Beaufort' at Oxford. It may have been after his year at Oxford that Henry Beaufort was sent

to Aachen in Germany, where he is said to have studied civil and canon law in his youth.

In the spring of 1390, seventeen-year-old John Beaufort — 'a great favourite with his father' - was among the thirty English knights who distinguished themselves tilting against the champions of France at the famous international jousts of St Inglevert near Calais; his father had put his name forward for this the previous November. His half-brother Thomas Swynford also took part, and the Duke may have nominated him too. They were in company with that passionate jousting Henry of Derby, John Holland and Henry Percy's heir and namesake, who bore the nickname Hotspur. The English contingent, lauded as 'the bravest of all the foreigners', returned home in early May, but only days later, Henry of Derby and Thomas Swynford departed for Calais, hell-bent on going to fight the Turks in Tunisia in what was known as the Barbary Crusade. John of Gaunt was in Calais to see them off, but being refused a safe-conduct through France, they decided instead to respond to a call for aid from the Teutonic Knights, who were fighting their own crusade against the heathen of Eastern Europe, and raced back to England to take up what they plainly regarded as a worthier cause.

Katherine, like many mediaeval mothers, was quickly having to accustom herself to her sons going off to fight in foreign parts, for John Beaufort, meanwhile - partly financed by his father - *had* been permitted to travel through France with four knights towards Genoa to join the Barbary Crusade, in which he was to serve under the French Duke of Bourbon; in designating Beaufort leader of the English contingent, Bourbon tacitly acknowledged his high status. In December, after the Christian forces failed to take Al-Mahdiya, near Tunis, young John returned to England to be reunited with his family.

With John of Gaunt in such favour, the fortunes of Geoffrey Chaucer too were in the ascendant. In July 1389, when Richard was urging the Duke to return to England, Chaucer had been appointed Clerk of the King's Works, an important post that gave him overall responsibility for improvements to royal property and the building of new royal residences. By 1390, he was supervising a large workforce employed on the restoration of the royal chapel at Windsor Castle; it was probably in that year that his precocious son Lewis was sent up to Oxford, where he may have kept company with his cousin, Henry Beaufort.

By September 1391, Chaucer had been replaced — for reasons we

don't know - as Clerk of the King's Works, for at that time we find him serving as deputy forester in the royal park at North Petherton in Somerset (where in 1394-5 his son Thomas was joint petitioner in a lawsuit with his new wife, Maud Burghersh), and probably writing his most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales*, which was almost certainly inspired by the *Decameron* of Boccaccio (from which some of the tales were lifted) and a pilgrimage Chaucer had made to St Thomas a Becket's shrine at Canterbury in 1388. He had evidently been in financial difficulties for some time, but in 1394, the King granted him a life pension of £20 (£8,750), which eased matters a little, although he was to apply for advances on his income several times until 1399, which suggests he continued to struggle to make ends meet. Chaucer remained in his post at North Petherton until at least 1398, and living so far away, he is hardly likely to have had much contact with Katherine Swynford, but in the years to come, John of Gaunt and Henry of Derby were to show favour to him and his son, which may have owed more than a little to her influence.

John of Gaunt accompanied Henry of Derby and Thomas Swynford back to England, and said his farewells to them at Hertford Castle. With Mary de Bohun — again pregnant - now of the company, Henry and his companions rode north to Lincolnshire, where they made offerings in Lincoln Cathedral for the success of their holy venture. It would be surprising if, while in Lincoln, they had not visited - or even lodged with — Katherine Swynford, and taken their leave of her. Around 19 July 1390, hugely backed by the Duke to the tune of £4,000 (£1,607,802), Henry, with Thomas Swynford and a large company of knights, esquires and servants, took ship from Boston for Prussia and Lithuania. Some weeks later, Mary de Bohun gave birth to her fourth son, Humphrey, naming him after her father.

As his son sailed away, John of Gaunt was lavishly entertaining King Richard and Queen Anne to a great hunting party at Leicester Castle, where he strove to bring about a reconciliation between the King and the former Lords Appellant. There is no mention of Katherine or the Beauforts among the many bishops, lords and ladies described by Knighton as being present, and Christmas that year saw John at Eltham Palace, where the King returned his hospitality.

The following year, however, evidence emerges to suggest that Katherine and John had rekindled their relationship. The Duke's household check-rolls for the year 1391-2 fortunately survive, and they show that all four Beauforts were now intermittently in attendance on him and based in his household; John Beaufort was

stabling six horses there. The rolls also reveal that Katherine Swynford was stabling twelve horses at the ducal residences at this time, which not only proves that she and John had renewed their acquaintance, but also strongly suggests that she was again occupying a substantially important place in his life. It shows too that she was well attended whenever she came to visit the Duke, as became a lady of high standing. i2d (£13.82) per day was allocated to her while she was lodging in his household, compared with 6d (£6.91) each for the Beauforts and 4d (£4.61) for Henry of Derby. This is unlikely to have been for their own keep, but for that of their horses.

But she was not residing with John permanently at this time — she rented the Chancery until at least 1393 - and her intermittent presence in his establishment must have been in part due to her desire to see her children. There was no question that it was greatly to their benefit to live in the household of so great a lord — Katherine would have recognised that. She had clearly brought them up well, and it had perhaps been decided long before that the Beauforts would come to their father on his return from his Castilian venture.

Considering that John and Constance were now living apart, that he was aged beyond his years but perhaps not sufficiently to dampen the old Adam in him, and that they would marry in due course, it would be logical to conclude that he and Katherine had grown close again. Constance's withdrawal had left them free to rekindle their relationship, and it is possible that they had become lovers once more, although if this was the case, they must have been very discreet about it, for Katherine was openly visiting the Duke, attended by an entourage, without attracting adverse comment. Although there is no hint of scandal in the chronicles, it is clear from what Froissart, an eyewitness at the court of Richard II, states, that in 1396, people at court were saying that the Duke had married the woman who had been his concubine for a long time, 'inside and outside his marriage', which must mean after it ended in 1394, since we have established that their liaison began after John had married Constance. Elsewhere, Froissart says that John loved and maintained Katherine after Constance's death. This all strongly suggests that a sexual relationship between them was regarded as an established fact, and not only in the distant past. Katherine was now about forty-one, young enough to bear children, but old enough to have passed the menopause, so pregnancy might not have been a risk.

Of course, this may be putting too modern an interpretation on their relationship: John had twice publicly repented of his former life, and

promised to God the complete amendment of his ways, and Katherine had not only accepted his renunciation of their love in good part, but had perhaps bought herself a papal indulgence by donating funds to his 'crusade'. That all suggests a sincere degree of repentance on both sides. Each of them may have been reluctant to prejudice the state of grace they had reached by backsliding into immorality, and they might well have considered the effect that discovery of a sexual affair might have on their maturing children and their wider families. On the other hand, aristocratic society took a lenient view of extramarital affairs, so any evidence that the Duke and Katherine Swynford were once again lovers would probably have been accepted with tolerance in courtly circles. And privately, within the family — and even by the King, whose treatment of Katherine proves he was aware she was more than the average royal mistress — it may have been known that if the opportunity ever arose, John intended to marry Katherine.

It may be too that the horror John had clearly felt in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt was now a distant memory. He and Katherine were both heart-free and no longer young. Maybe they decided to seize the chance of happiness while they could. And, so long as discretion was maintained, who could have blamed them?

In the spring of 1391, the Duke was probably at Lincoln - he dated a letter there on 5 March, omitting the year, to the ruler of Lithuania, asking him to release two of Henry's knights, so the letter almost certainly belongs to 1391. That same month, he arranged for Gascon wine to be sent to Katherine in Lincoln by cart from London. Perhaps he had visited her at the Chancery, and wished to reward her hospitality; perhaps there was more to it than that. He was back at Westminster when Henry of Derby and Thomas Swynford returned from their crusading adventure (and a winter spent enjoying the hospitality of the Teutonic Knights) around 30 April; John Beaufort was there to greet them when they disembarked at Hull. It was probably after their return that the Duke invited Thomas Swynford to serve him as one of his chamber knights; his presence in the Duke's household is attested to by the surviving checkrolls.¹⁰⁴ On 12 May 1393, as a signal mark of royal favour, Richard II would grant an annuity of 100 marks (£15,179) to Thomas and his wife Jane.¹⁰⁵

As we have seen, John of Gaunt was well aware of the pressing need to make suitable provision for his bastard children, and in December 1390, the King licensed him, along with Sir Thomas Percy and the Lancastrian receiver in Northamptonshire, to grant the manors of Overstone, Maxey, Eydon and a half share in Brampton Parva,

together worth £88 (£35.372) a year, to John Beaufort, with reversion to Thomas and Joan Beaufort. Henry Beaufort's name is missing from the reversions because he was already earmarked for a career in the Church.

John of Gaunt spent the Christmas of 1391 at Hertford, bringing his minstrels with him. Katherine and their daughter Joan were among the guests, as were Henry of Derby and his family, and at New Year, Henry gave gifts to Katherine and Joan. Katherine received a gold ring set with a diamond, and Joan 'a pair of paternosters' (rosary beads) of coral and gold. Joan was soon to marry Sir Robert Ferrers, who at nineteen was about four years her senior; the date of their wedding is not known, but it had certainly taken place by 30 September 1394, and is likely to have been celebrated in 1392, because their daughter Elizabeth is described as being aged eighteen and more in 1411: she had thus been born in 1393 at the latest. Joan also had another daughter, Mary, probably named in honour of Mary de Bohun, whose patronage Joan had long enjoyed. After their wedding, Joan and her husband remained in John of Gaunt's household.

In the spring of 1392, John of Gaunt was at Amiens negotiating with the French King, Charles VI, who hailed him as the most revered knight in Christendom. The Duke 'took the view that the war had lasted long enough and that a good peace would benefit the whole of Christendom', but all he could secure was a year's truce. While he was away, Mary de Bohun bore a daughter, Blanche, at Henry of Derby's manor house at Peterborough, a residence she seems to have favoured. The Duke returned to England in April, and before June, thanks to his influence, John Beaufort was appointed one of the King's household knights on an income of 100 marks (£13,903) per annum — an acknowledgement of the younger John's proven military expertise. Soon afterwards, Henry of Derby departed on another crusade, to Prussia this time, and Henry Beaufort returned to Queen's College, Oxford, where he would complete a degree in theology in the summer of 1393. On 23 November 1392, Constance's pleasure-loving sister, Isabella, Duchess of York, died; she was 'buried by the King's command at his manor of Langley, in the friars' church', where Richard II himself would one day be temporarily laid to rest.

Katherine's lease on the Chancery is known to have run until 1393 at least, and she may not have vacated the property until 1396.²¹ There is no evidence of her role in the Duke's busy life at this time, nor that she was a guest in the Lancastrian household at Christmas 1392. References to her children are rare, but all were comfortably seeded

by 1393: John in the royal household, Henry at university, Joan married, and Thomas with his father; further evidence of family solidarity emerged in December of that year, when Henry of Derby - just back from his crusade and a long pilgrimage to the Holy Land — ordered new suits of armour to be sent to Hertford Castle for the use of himself and Thomas Beaufort in the jousts he planned to hold there. The Duke joined his family at Hertford for the Christmas festivities of 1393, and this time Katherine Swynford *was* among the company. Henry presented his wife and 'Dame Katherine Swynford' with four lengths of luxurious white damask silk at 78s.4d (£1,778) each. Her being given the same gift - and costly material -as the Countess strongly suggests that Katherine was now a very prominent member of the Duke's circle.

In January 1394, Henry hastened to London to take part in yet another tournament; in the midst of the excitement, he remembered to send a hamper of fish delicacies to Hertford for Mary, who was pregnant for the seventh time. Katherine also said farewell to John Beaufort, who departed early in 1394 on another crusade in Lithuania and Hungary, during which he is thought to have fought with the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Lettow. Katherine was living in Lincoln or at Kettlethorpe for at least part of 1394: on 27 February, in order to lay claim to his inheritance, Thomas Swynford was required to present proof of age at Lincoln, and Katherine was ordered to be present; she was there one Friday when he and his many witnesses turned up with their evidence, which was some time between 22 June 1394 and 22 June 1395. After this, Sir Thomas apparently took possession of his manors and established himself at Kettlethorpe; his mother Katherine would nevertheless remain in control there, for Thomas was often absent in the service of the House of Lancaster.

In the Hilary Parliament of 1394, John of Gaunt found himself the object of vitriolic criticism by the abrasive Earl of Arundel, who was jealous of his influence with the King. It was contrary to the King's honour for him to be often seen walking arm in arm with the Duke, Arundel complained, and to wear the Lancastrian livery collar; furthermore, the Duke had so intimidated the lords with 'rough and bitter words' that they were now afraid to speak up in Council or Parliament; and the King should not have alienated Aquitaine to his uncle, nor given him money to invade Castile. Arundel had hoped to play on the King's vanity by implying that the monarch was the Duke's client, but a 'grieved and displeased' Richard spoke up vigorously for his uncle and forced Arundel to apologise publicly to him — after which Parliament declared the Duke free from any cause for blame,

and Arundel, who had received no support from the other nobles, retired to sulk in private. Afterwards, John of Gaunt, clearly fearing that his integrity and loyalty had been impugned, wrote to the King: 'I dare to call God to witness, and all loyal men, that never have I imagined, or tried to do, anything against your most honourable estate.'

Following his sons' departure, John also left England that spring: in March 1394, he went to France, where, on the 27th, he concluded a four-year truce with the French. He was therefore out of the country when the Duchess Constance died on 24 March at Leicester Castle, leaving him a free man.

'My Dearest Lady Katherine'

It is unlikely that John of Gaunt had gone to France earlier in the month knowing that his wife was dying. There is no indication that Constance had suffered a long illness - she was at a hunting party and festive gathering at Much Hadham in July 1393 - and in those days even a virus could prove fatal. Moreover, her funeral was delayed until July so that the Duke could attend it; after signing a peace treaty at Leulighen on 24 March, the day of her death, he was obliged to remain in France until late June.

The year 1394 was to witness the tragic deaths of three royal ladies in quick succession, although 'the grief of all these deaths by no means equalled that of the King', for on 7 June, at Sheen, Queen Anne died of the plague, plunging Richard II — who had loved her 'even to madness' — into such all-consuming grief that he was to order that the wing of the palace in which she had breathed her last be razed to the ground.⁵ Then, on 4 July, just ten days after John of Gaunt's return to England, and a month after she had borne her seventh child, a daughter called Philippa, Mary de Bohun passed away at Peterborough, aged only twenty-six and possibly a victim of puerperal fever. Katherine Swynford may have been in attendance on her during her last weeks, and the loss of her young patroness must have caused her considerable grief.

Meanwhile, John of Gaunt had travelled north to Leicester to attend Constance's burial before the high altar in the collegiate church of St Mary in the Newarke at Leicester, and a hasty decision was made to have Mary interred there the next day in the choir, while all the mourners were gathered; these obsequies took place with great ceremony, and at staggering expense, totalling £584.55 (£255,62i), on 5 and 6 July, just days after Mary had died.

It has sometimes been suggested that Constance was buried at Leicester because the Duke neither wanted her to lie beside him for eternity nor considered that she merited a great state funeral; yet he did not choose to be buried with his beloved Katherine Swynford either, while the cost of Constance's obsequies and her interment in the established mausoleum of the House of Lancaster strongly suggests

that John wanted every honour paid to the memory of the woman who — whatever tensions had lain between them - had been his Duchess for twenty-two years.

Having received two salutary reminders of the frailty of human life, John of Gaunt soon afterwards ordered alabaster effigies of himself and Blanche of Lancaster for their tomb in St Paul's Cathedral, and he was to raise 'a tomb of marble with an image of brass like a queen on it' for his 'dear companion, Dame Constance'. He also, in his will of 1399, arranged for an obit to be celebrated every year on the anniversary of her death in perpetuity, for the safety of her soul. In 1413, Henry V commissioned an effigy of his mother, Mary de Bohun, from a London coppersmith, which would he on her marble tomb.

The third royal funeral was somewhat more dramatic. At the end of July, when Queen Anne was buried with great pomp in Westminster Abbey, the Earl of Arundel, still smarting after his forced apology to John of Gaunt, had the insolence to turn up late, provoking an outraged Richard II to strike him in the face and draw blood, thereby desecrating the sanctity of the church, which had to be re-consecrated before the funeral could continue. Arundel was committed to the Tower for several weeks, then made to swear an oath guaranteeing his future loyalty *and* pay the King a large indemnity.

John of Gaunt prudently went north; on 24 August, he was with his grieving family at Pontefract, and the following day, having heard to his dismay that there were people at court questioning his own loyalty to the King, and being mindful that Richard's temper was on a short fuse, he wrote him a letter protesting his loyalty. This evidently paid off, for in September, the King confirmed him as Duke of Aquitaine, which meant that John would have to go there without delay, in order to enforce the royal authority and look after his interests in the Duchy. Immediately he began assembling his retinue at Leicester, prior to sailing from Plymouth early in October.

John Beaufort was going with him — it is possible that, around this time, the Duke planned to create a new fief for the young man in Aquitaine, although this was not to remain a viable prospect for long — and Katherine was no doubt bracing herself for another prolonged parting from John, and from their son. Silva-Vigier suggests that she actually accompanied the Duke to Aquitaine on this occasion, but there is no evidence or comment in the chronicles or official records to support this theory, which there surely would have been had she gone. The fact that the Chancery was not leased to the new Chancellor

until after 1396, and that he had had to be found alternative accommodation in 1391—2, strongly suggests that Katherine was still living there during the Duke's absence in 1394-5.

By the time he left for Aquitaine, John had probably made up his mind to marry Katherine Swynford. The text of a letter from Pope Boniface IX dated 1 September 1396 makes it clear that 'when Constance, of blessed memory, had come to the end of her life, Duke John and Katherine, desiring to marry' had applied for a dispensation, which was necessary because of the compaternity created by John long ago acting as godfather to Katherine's daughter. This reads as if the approach to the Pope had been made as soon after the death of the Duchess as was decent, and it also suggests that John had already resolved to marry Katherine as soon as he was free to do so; this would in part explain the esteem in which she had been held by his family and the King, and it may also have been the reason why Katherine had never remarried. Armitage-Smith thought that the Duke may have enquired even before Constance died if there were impediments to his marrying Katherine, although that is unlikely, as Constance's death seems to have been rather sudden. Any enquiries were probably made after her demise.

According to Pope Boniface, the couple, 'being not unaware that John had lifted from the font a daughter of the same Katherine, begotten by another man, and that later the same Duke John adulterously knew the same Katherine, she being free of wedlock, but with marriage still existing between the same Duke John and the aforesaid Constance, and begot offspring of her; and believing that marriage between them was now allowable because, the impediment of the aforesaid compaternity not being notorious but rather occult', sent a petitioner (whose name is unknown) to the Holy See to obtain the necessary dispensation. The Pope obligingly delivered to this petitioner a brief, 'signed by our own hand, and containing therein a declaration of our having given our consent in this matter by word of mouth'. Because the impediment was not notorious, Boniface had felt it necessary to give only an oral dispensation. The 'credential brief in which it was enshrined does not survive, and there is no record of the date on which it was issued. Given the time it would have taken for the petitioner to travel from England to Rome, where the legitimist Papacy was now based, the delays that may have been encountered in obtaining the brief

(although the Pope would not have wished to inconvenience his staunch supporter, the Duke of Lancaster, too greatly), and the fact

that the marriage did not take place until January 1396, it may be that the dispensation was not applied for until a year had elapsed since Constance's death, and that the marriage was further delayed by John setting his affairs in order in Aquitaine, for he did not return to England until December 1395. This is not to say that marrying Katherine was not a priority with John, just that he had to wait for a decent interval to pass after Constance's death, for the Pope to act, and to meet his own obligations, before he could proceed.

It was virtually unheard of at that time for a royal duke to marry his mistress, especially one who was the daughter of a humble foreign knight, and John could have been in no doubt that the union would prove highly controversial. Twice he had entered into wedlock for political reasons: once successfully, the other time far less so. Even now, at fifty-five and old by contemporary standards, he was an eligible prize in the European marriage market, and could easily have made a political alliance that favoured his cherished peace process with France, or an advantageous union with an heiress that would handsomely augment the Lancastrian domains. That he did not pursue such alliances speaks volumes. Instead, he was resolved to make the unusual, highly unconventional and indeed brave choice of marrying for love. There can be little doubt that his feelings for Katherine played a large part in his decision — Froissart says he 'had always loved and maintained this Lady Katherine', and the settlements that he was to make on her during their marriage are ample evidence of his feelings for her.

But there was more to it than that. 'From affection to [their] children, the Duke married their mother,' Froissart adds, making it seem as if Katherine really did not come into the equation, although the chronicler may have drawn this conclusion himself, unable, along with many other people, to comprehend that the mighty Duke of Lancaster had so far forgotten himself as to marry for love. Yet love for Katherine aside, John's desire to see the Beauforts legitimised was surely a powerful enough motive for marrying her, and perhaps just as important to the Duke. They were now growing up and proving themselves able and gifted, and he must have wanted them to enjoy the high offices of Church and State for which their royal blood befitted them and for which he had had them educated; and he perhaps also had a view to forging advantageous noble alliances through them. He may, too, in the wake of that series of tragic deaths, have felt the hand of time upon him; he was fifty-four when Constance died, and — as we have seen -aged beyond his years, although he must have been reasonably fit at this time because he was

contemplating going crusading against the Turks in distant lands; nevertheless, he perhaps felt an impulsion to seize whatever happiness he could while he could still enjoy life, *and* secure his children's future before he died. These things, Katherine and the children, were clearly so important to him that he was prepared to brave public opinion to have his desire.

It~was almost certainly with this aim in mind that, probably before he went abroad, John made provision for his eldest son by Katherine, and for the Chaucers. It was possibly in 1394, and certainly before 28 September 1397, that John Beaufort was married to Margaret Holland, daughter of Thomas Holland, Earl of Kent, the son of the late Princess Joan by her first husband; Margaret was therefore a niece of the King, and she had been born about 1381-5. By 1395, in order to provide for the young couple, the Duke had purchased for John Beaufort the reversion of the manors of Curry Rivel, Langport and Martock in Somerset.

Around the same time, John made a gift of 20 marks (£2,917) to Thomas Chaucer, doubled his pension to £20 (£8,750), and paid £100 (£43,749) to secure his marriage to a wealthy heiress, Maud, the daughter of Sir John Burghersh of Ewelme; she came from a respected baronial family and brought him large estates in Surrey and Oxfordshire. Such lavish generosity towards Katherine's nephew indicates not only a desire to please her, but also a genuine appreciation of Thomas Chaucer's worth. Nor was Thomas's father Geoffrey, still ensconced in the wilds of Somerset, forgotten, for it was during this year of 1394-5 that Henry of Derby sent him a grant of money and a fur-lined scarlet robe.

Summoned by the King, who wanted the Duke's support for the French marriage alliance that Thomas of Woodstock was so hotly opposing, John of Gaunt, armed with the Pope's brief, returned to England in December 1395. He was no longer feeling in the best of health, and the crossing from Calais to Kent must have been disagreeable, even painful, for him: for when, late in November, he had visited Brittany and opened ultimately unsuccessful negotiations for a marriage between his grandson, Henry of Monmouth, and Duke John de Montfort's daughter, he had declined an invitation to attend the wedding as 'it will be very hard-going and very uncomfortable to him to sail'. This suggests he was suffering some bodily infirmity at this time, possibly the recurrent malady to which he was to refer in 1398, which may be one reason why he made a short pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas a Becket at Canterbury upon returning to

England, no doubt to give thanks for his safe return home, pray for relief for his complaint and ask the saint's blessing on his coming marriage.

John was still in Canterbury at the beginning of January 1396, for his son Henry sent him nineteen ells of velvet there as a New Year gift. He left soon afterwards for Langley, Hertfordshire, to pay his respects to Richard II and seek his permission to marry Katherine Swynford. More than twenty years later, Walsingham claimed that the marriage came as a surprise to the King, but as his foremost subject, it is hardly likely that John of Gaunt, that great traditionalist and pillar of the monarchy, would have omitted his feudal obligation to obtain royal sanction for the marriage to go ahead. It is also doubtful if the Duke's request came as a surprise to Richard, who apparently readily gave his consent. His manner towards his uncle, however, although cordial, was noticeably cool and, some said, 'without love'. He wanted John's backing, it was true, but he did not want him dominating political affairs as before. This change in Richard marked the beginning of the end of John's political influence, which would now slowly but steadily decline; his health, of course, could also have been a factor. Nevertheless, he was to maintain a constant presence at court in the coming years, and would witness every royal charter up till July 1398.

Katherine herself must have been in Lincolnshire at this time, probably living at the Chancery, although she was still exercising authority as the Lady of Kettlethorpe — on 4 December, she presented a new rector to the parish church there. This was none other than John Huntman, the Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral, he who had had to seek alternative accommodation in 1391—2 because Katherine was in possession of his official residence, the Chancery. In appointing him Rector of Kettlethorpe, was Katherine attempting to compensate in some way for the inconvenience she had caused?

John did not delay long at court, but, having obtained the King's permission to depart, set off north to Lincolnshire, to Katherine, to make her his wife without further delay. They 'publicly contracted marriage'²⁷ very soon after the Octave of the Epiphany, which fell on 13 January 1396 — possibly their wedding took place on the 14th, or even as late as February, which is far less likely. The ceremony in Lincoln Cathedral was probably conducted before the splendid chancel screen by the ageing Bishop Buckingham, who is known to have been in Lincoln later that month. Evidently John's health had improved, for, as he and Katherine later confided to the Pope, their marriage was

consummated 'by carnal copulation'. There can be no doubt that they were lovers once more.

Katherine was now the Duchess of Lancaster and, in the absence of a queen, the first lady in the land - a position she could not expect to enjoy for long, because the coming spring would see the signing of a new peace with France that was to be cemented by the marriage of Richard II to Charles VI's six-year-old daughter Isabella.

Katherine's feelings at this time may only be imagined. They must have encompassed love and gratitude with regard to the man who was now her husband, and perhaps a sense of relief that the long years of self-denial, steadfastness, waiting and uncertainty were over - not to mention triumph and elation at having come to a safe harbour at last, and at making such a spectacular marriage in the process, something that no other royal mistress of that age — and only a privileged few in other periods — would ever achieve. She was set up for life, and would never again have to worry about financial security." There was, too, the comforting knowledge that the way was now clear for her Beaufort children to be formally legitimised, and that their futures were secure — as indeed were those of Thomas Swynford and Katherine's Chaucer relatives.

But Katherine must also have been aware that society at large might not view her as the most suitable wife for the Duke. Notoriety and a tarnished reputation had never been desirable qualities in royal wives; moreover, John was a prince of the highest rank and renown, and could have advantageously made a grand marriage for profit or policy; that he should stoop to marry a woman of far lower degree, however highly regarded she was by his family, was unthinkable. But he had defied convention and done so, and now here she was, exalted above all other women in the realm.

In order to emphasise her royal status, and perhaps at the same time hopefully to obliterate memories of her immoral past, Katherine assumed as her coat of arms the three gold wheels of St Katherine, her patron saint, who was strongly associated with royalty, virtue and erudition in the popular imagination. These wheels were blazoned on a red shield, and they would have been prominently displayed on hangings, trappings, furnishings, clothing and livery badges. They appeared in profusion on the vestments she was to give to Lincoln Cathedral, and they also adorned her tomb there,³⁴ while the image of St Katherine appears in the Beaufort Hours, a manuscript commissioned after 1401 by John Beaufort, who clearly wanted to

honour his mother and associate her memory with the saint.³⁵ The conversion of the silver Roët wheels into gold Katherine wheels suggests both a deep devotion to her name-saint, and a conscious effort on the part of the new Duchess to construct a far more respectable public image for herself.³⁶

It is highly likely that the Duke was also involved in this mediaeval version of 'spin-doctoring', or was even the inspiration behind it. After all, he had a vested interest in the heraldic emblems of the Lancastrian inheritance, and in the way people regarded his wife, whose character and demeanour reflected on his own nobility and honour; at the very least, Katherine would have had to consult him on this matter and seek his approval — married women in the Middle Ages enjoyed little autonomy, even if they had become used to making their own decisions during a long widowhood, as Katherine clearly had. One may infer from the sources quoted in this chapter, however, that John was a loving husband eager to make his lady happy. It may be that it was he who, after their marriage, arranged for the reburial of her father in St Paul's Cathedral, or for the erection of a memorial tablet on Sir Paon de Roët's existing grave there.

It was to Katherine's advantage that 'she had a perfect knowledge of court etiquette, because she had been brought up in princely courts continually since her youth'; this made her eminently well-qualified for her new rank, and it would have given her confidence as she came to grips with the realities of her new status.

The newly wedded Duke and Duchess made a short trip up north together before facing the court; possibly John wished to test the water by taking Katherine on a tour of his domains. By 23 January, they were lodging at Pontefract, a place that might have held bitter but long-exorcised memories for them, but which clearly became a favoured retreat during their marriage. High on its escarpment, the castle enjoyed commanding views of the River Aire; the royal lodgings were in the turreted trefoil-shaped donjon, which the Duke had had heightened twenty years earlier, so that it dwarfed all the other towers. Here he and Katherine would have resided in great comfort and luxury, for he had lavished huge sums of money on the place.³⁸

By 10 March, they had moved north-westwards to Rothwell Castle, a thirteenth-century royal hunting lodge owned by the Duke, which lay hard by his manor of Leeds. They stayed there until the 31st, before travelling south.

It may have been at this time — it was certainly in 1396 — that they broke their journey at Coventry, where they were admitted as members of the prosperous Guild of the Holy Trinity, St Mary, St John the Baptist and St Katherine. The ceremony either took place in St Mary's Guild Hall (constructed between 1340 and 1460) in the heart of the town, or at the Guild's chapel in the collegiate church dedicated to St John the Baptist, which had been founded by John's grandmother, Queen Isabella, the widow of Edward II; in 1344, she had given land in Coventry to the Guild of St John for the founding of the chapel. This Guild had later amalgamated with those of St Katherine and Holy Trinity. Since their patron saints were both represented, John and Katherine would have felt a special affinity with this Guild.

The new Duchess made her debut at court some time in April, probably at the St George's Day celebrations, for she was issued with Garter robes that year. Her appearance there, and the announcement of her marriage to the Duke, gave rise to stunned shock and widespread disapproval, for most people regarded it as a disastrous misalliance: 'the which wedding caused many a man's wondering for, as it was said, he had held her long before'.

'Everyone was amazed at the miracle of this event,' wrote Walsingham with some irony, 'since the fortune of such a woman in no way matched a magnate of such exalted rank.' Froissart says the marriage 'caused much astonishment', in France as well as in England, 'for she was of humble birth, far unmeet to match with his Highness, and nothing comparable in honour to his two former wives, the Duchess Blanche and Duchess Constance,' while he was the richest, most powerful and most eligible catch in the land. In the fifteenth century, the chronicler John Capgrave recalled how the Duke had married Katherine 'against the opinion of many men'. Even in our own time, such a marriage would cause comment. 'Men of title and privilege simply do not marry their mistresses,' observed the late Queen Mother, so we may imagine how much greater an outcry the union of John and Katherine provoked in 1396.

'When the news of this marriage reached the great ladies of England, such as the Duchess of Gloucester, the Countess of Derby [*sic*], Mary de Bohun had, of course, died in 1394], the Countess of Arundel [a Mortimer, and a descendant of Edward III] and other ladies with royal blood in their veins, they were surprised and shocked, considering it scandalous, and thought the Duke much to blame. They said that he had sadly disgraced himself by marrying his concubine, a woman of

light character' — for such they apparently still perceived Katherine to be. Many thought John of Gaunt a fool, including perhaps Chaucer, who was the same age: around this time, in a poem dedicated to his friend Henry Scogan, he wrote that he was beginning to see himself as beyond the age for love and marriage. What, then, did he think of the Duke?

What rankled most with the great ladies was that the new Duchess of Lancaster would take precedence before them. 'Since she has got so far,' they sniffed, 'it will mean that she will rank as the second lady in England, and the young Queen will be dishonourably accompanied by her.' But they were plotting their revenge. 'For their parts, they would leave her to do the honours of the court by herself,' they declared, 'for they would never enter any place where she was. They themselves might be disgraced if they permitted a woman of so base a birth, and concubine to the Duke for a very long time, inside and outside his marriage with the Princess Constance, to have place before them. Their hearts would burst with vexation, and righdy so!'

The two people who were the most incensed and 'outrageous' about the marriage were Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, 'a man of an high mind and a stout stomach' who 'misliked his brother matching so meanly' and considered him 'a doting fool', and Thomas's wife, Eleanor de Bohun. 'They considered that the Duke of Lancaster had overstepped all bounds when he took his concubine to wife, and said they would never recognise her marriage, or call her lady or sister.' However, John's other brother, Edmund of Langley, 'soon got over it, for he was most often in the company of the King' - who, we may infer, supported the marriage — 'and his brother of Lancaster. The Duke of Gloucester was of different stuff, for he respected no one's opinions.'

To make matters worse, by means that are not recorded, the existence of an impediment to the marriage, that of compaternity, somehow became 'publicly known', and because John and Katherine could produce 'no apostolic letters authorising its dispensation' — they had been given only an oral brief, not a full dispensation - they became 'apprehensive' that their marriage could 'very likely be impugned, and an annulment follow, and grave scandals arise therefrom'. They therefore 'made humble supplication' once more to Pope Boniface, 'that we deign of our apostolic benignity to provide for them concerning the aforesaid' and pronounce on the legitimacy of their children.⁴⁵ They must then have spent many anxious months awaiting his reply, and hoping that no English bishop would see fit in the

meantime to enquire into the validity of their union.

Richard II, however, was welcoming to Katherine; it was he who had issued her with Garter robes so that she could participate in the St George's Day ceremonies. After those were completed, the Duke and Duchess moved to London, where they probably took up residence at Ely Place. There, on 16 May, John assigned Katherine the generous sum of £600 (£243,620) per annum, to be paid by his Receiver-General, for the expenses of her wardrobe, obviously anticipating that his new Duchess would dress herself and furnish her apartments as lavishly as her rank merited. Like John's previous wives, Katherine had her own separate wardrobe and household; we know nothing of its composition, however, or the names of her officers and ladies.

In June, the King granted his uncle a charter of liberties for the Duchy of Lancaster, and proposed that his future Queen's sister, Michelle of Valois, be married to John's grandson, Henry of Monmouth. Richard also supported John in forbidding Henry of Derby to brave the dangers of a campaign in Friesland with the Duke of Gueldres.

John's worsening health may account for his fears for the safety of his heir, who had been on perilous expeditions in the past, some financed by his father; yet his anxiety did not apparently extend to his younger son, John Beaufort, who went crusading against the Turks in Hungary and Bulgaria in 1396, and in September was present at the siege of Nicopolis, a campaign that ended in the mass capture and slaughter of the Christian army and left Bulgaria under Muslim domination for five centuries. John Beaufort, fortunately, came home to tell the tale.

Before long, the storm that followed upon her marriage abated, and Katherine became accepted at court and within the royal family. This probably had a lot to do with Richard II's support and his improving relations with John of Gaunt, but it was undoubtedly due in no small part to Katherine's own personal qualities, her discretion and dignity, and her well-bred understanding of how to conduct herself as a duchess. 'The lady herself was a woman of such bringing up and honourable demeanour that envy could not but in the end give place to well-deserving.' Above all, 'she loved the Duke of Lancaster and the children she had with him, and she showed it'.⁵² None could have impugned her sincerity.

In July 1396, with the conclusion of the new treaties between England and France, preparations were set in train at last for the King's marriage to Isabella of Valois. Early in August, John apparently went

to Calais with the King for a meeting with the Duke of Burgundy, returning to England by the 23rd.⁵³ Some time before Michaelmas, perhaps at Katherine's request, the Duke arranged for two pipes of wine to be conveyed from London to the abbey of Barking, and there given to her daughter Margaret Swynford; and before 15 September, he took Katherine to St Albans Abbey to visit Abbot Thomas de la Mare, who was dying after ten years of chronic ill health brought on by an attack of the plague. The Abbot had been a friend of the Black Prince and the exiled King John II of France, and would have shared many memories with John of Gaunt. The purpose of the visit was no doubt to ask for the Abbot's blessing and say a sad farewell. Later that month, the Duke and Duchess were at Hertford Castle, where they had probably been lodging for most of the month.

Meanwhile, on 1 September, in Rome, Boniface IX had pronounced their marriage valid:

We therefore [he wrote], who freely seek the peace and tranquillity and health of mind of all Christ's faithful, especially of those who are illustrious because of sublime dignity, desiring to avoid such scandals to the extent that we can under God, and wishing salubriously to provide otherwise for the abovementioned circumstances, being inclined to such supplications, we ratify, approve and confirm by apostolic authority the aforesaid marriage contracted between John and Katherine, and we reinforce it by the protection of the present document.

He then proceeded to pronounce on the legitimacy of their children:

And so that the same John and Katherine may freely and licitly remain in the said marriage contracted between them, the impediment and other matters described above completely notwithstanding, we dispense them through the same authority by the tenor of the present letters, declaring legitimate offspring received and to be received from this marriage.

This clearly refers to the Beauforts and to any other children that might be born to the couple — obviously the Pope had no idea that Katherine was about forty-six and highly unlikely to become pregnant again. But he had provided for that contingency anyway, and he concluded his letter with the warning that anyone presuming to question the validity of the marriage would incur 'the indignation of Almighty God'.⁵⁷ That, of course, was sufficient to silence any critics, and John and Katherine would doubtless have been quite relieved to

receive this dispensation. It may have arrived in England before they left for France, which was shortly after 7 October.

The King having already crossed the Channel, Henry of Derby and Joan Beaufort accompanied their father and Katherine when they travelled to Calais in October. On the 27th, at a lavish ceremony near the town, attended by much pomp and pageantry (the wedding celebrations were rumoured to have cost Richard £200,000, more than £81 million in today's values), the two kings met; Charles VI had already experienced attacks of the madness that was to blight his life and reign, but he was enjoying a lucid interval on this occasion, and cordial pleasantries were exchanged.

On the 28th, with John and Katherine and a host of other lords and ladies looking on, little Isabella was carried to her father's pavilion and formally handed over by Charles VI to her bridegroom, who thanked him 'for so gracious and honourable a gift' and kissed the little girl. He then 'commended her to the Duchesses of Lancaster and Gloucester' — the senior royal ladies — 'and the Countesses of Huntingdon and Stafford and other ladies', including Joan Beaufort, who all received her with great joy before escorting her to Calais in twelve packed chariots. Evidently the Duchess of Gloucester had abandoned her resolve to have nothing to do with Katherine, while the latter's prominent role in the ceremonies demonstrates how quickly she had been accepted by the establishment and how respectable she had become.

The little Queen had already been assigned a French *gouvernante*, Lady de Coucy, and it was this lady who took charge of her and who was her sole companion in her richly appointed chariot on that ride to Calais. Of course Katherine was one of the chief ladies in attendance on Isabella and would have joined the other noble ladies in assisting the bride in her wedding preparations. But her association with Isabella was not limited to that, for Froissart, who was well informed about events at Richard II's court at this time, later stated that she 'had been some time the companion of the young Queen of England', and that she remained so until the late summer of 1397. She evidently took on this role at the time of Isabella's marriage and her influence would have been invaluable during the period immediately following it, when the court was travelling back to England and Isabella was being initiated into her new position. Who better to act as her companion and mentor than the Duchess of Lancaster, the second lady in the land, who had had experience of looking after royal princesses, and who was clearly good with children?

Katherine, along with her daughter Joan Beaufort, the Duchess of Gloucester and the Countess of Huntingdon, was given a gold livery collar to wear at the royal wedding. A heavy chain denoting rank, worn to proclaim the wearer's affiliation to some king or great lord, it might have been adorned with the Lancastrian SS links, but is more likely to have been bestowed by the King and to have incorporated his white hart emblem, and perhaps fleurs-de-lis in honour of the bride.

On 4 November, in the church of St Nicholas at Calais, Isabella was married to Richard II by Thomas Arundel, the new Archbishop of Canterbury; she was then not quite seven years old, and not a little precocious — 'it was pretty to see her, young as she was, practising how to act the Queen'. The ceremony was followed by sumptuous feasting.

The King and Queen (her dolls packed away with her trousseau) and all their party, including John and Katherine, crossed back to Dover in

November, the voyage taking just three hours. They dined and slept at Dover Castle the first night, then made their way towards London via Canterbury, Rochester, Dartford and Eltham, where the Duke and Duchess of Lancaster and the other lords and ladies presented cosy gifts to Isabella before taking their leave of the royal couple and hastening ahead to make ready for the young Queen's state entry into London.

On 13 November, Isabella made her way in triumph to the Tower, and on the following day, she was ceremoniously conducted to the King at Westminster; such were the crowds in the capital that nine people were crushed to death. It appears she was never crowned — a summons to her coronation on Epiphany Sunday 1397 survives, and an unreliable London chronicle states she was crowned on 8 January, but there is no other evidence for such a momentous event. John and Katherine entertained her at their London 'hostel' - Ely Place - probably late in 1396 or early in 1397, the Duke presenting her with a massive gold cup and basin, while Katherine gave her a much smaller cup, more suitable for a child to use. Isabella spent most of what was to prove a short married life in the care of Lady de Coucy at Windsor Castle or Eltham Palace, indulgently treated by her husband, of whom she became inordinately fond.

Papal confirmation of the marriage of John and Katherine not only put paid once and for all to the nasty rumours and backbiting, but also had an enormously beneficial impact on the lives of the Beauforts.

Joan Beaufort had recently been widowed - her husband, Robert Ferrers, died some time between May 1395 and November 1396 — and she was evidently now viewed as a highly desirable bride, for in November 1396, probably as soon as her parents returned to England, the powerful northern baron, Ralph Neville, 6th Baron of Raby, married her as his second wife. John of Gaunt, who was clearly pleased to have the thirty-two-year-old Neville as a son-in-law and ally, settled a handsome annuity of [£206.13s.4d](#)

(£89,914) on the couple for life. Neville's estates were in Durham and Yorkshire, and Joan was to make her home there. His first wife, Margaret Stafford, who had died in June that year, had borne him twelve children, so Joan, at just nineteen, became stepmother to a sizeable family on her marriage; yet those children, as will be seen, would have little cause to love her in the future.

It was probably at the request of John of Gaunt that in January 1397, the Pope issued a Bull appointing Henry Beaufort Dean of Wells Cathedral in Somerset, launching the twenty-year-old cleric on what was to prove a spectacular and meteoric career in the Church. John also pressed the King, with whom he was now on the best of terms, and who was desirous of his continuing support against the war lobby, to regularise the position of the Beauforts, and on 6 February, 'yielding to the prayers of your father', Richard issued Letters Patent formally legitimising them in law:

To our most dear cousins, the noble men, John the knight, Henry the clerk, Thomas the young gentleman, and to our beloved damsel the noble Joan Beaufort, the most dear relatives of our uncle, the noble John, Duke of Lancaster, born our lieges, greeting, and the favour of our royal majesty. Whilst internally considering how incessantly and with what honours we are graced by the very useful and sincere affection of our aforesaid uncle, and by the wisdom of his counsel, we think it proper and fit that, for the sake of his merits, and in contemplation of his favours, we should enrich you (who are endowed by Nature with great probity and honesty of life and behaviour, and are begotten of royal blood, and by the divine gift are adorned with many virtues) with the strength of our royal prerogative of favour and grace.

It was a gesture calculated to ensure the Duke's continuing friendship and loyalty. For the Pope's brief legitimising the Beauforts, although morally satisfactory, carried no weight under the laws of inheritance

in England: it was purely a spiritual expunging of the stain of bastardy, and could not lift the legal bar to them inheriting lands or tides. What was required was an Act of Parliament confirming their legitimacy in common law, and this Richard secured.

The King's Letters Patent were read out on 6 February 1397 in Parliament by Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury; then, on the 9th, it appears that a 'mande ceremony' was performed in the Parliament chamber, with the Duke and Duchess and their four offspring standing together beneath a mantle known as a 'care cloth'; normally, when the single parents of bastards married, they and their children stood under the care cloth during the wedding ceremony. Even so, only the Church recognised them as legitimate; feudal inheritances were strictly safeguarded from bastard interlopers, and under English common law, up until 1920, 'mantle' children could not inherit property. In the case of the Beauforts, the care cloth was used symbolically, while an Act - unique in English history - was passed confirming their legitimisation and declaring them fully capable in law of inheriting 'whatsoever dignities, honours, pre-eminences, status, ranks and offices, public and private, perpetual and temporal, feudal and noble there may be, as fully, freely and lawfully as if you were born in lawful wedlock'.⁷

Being formally declared legitimate facilitated the full acceptance of the Beauforts into the royal House and removed all barriers to their preferment in the peerage and the Church, and further improved their prospects, literally overnight in the case of the chivalrous John Beaufort, for on 10 February the King created him Earl of Somerset, himself girding him with the sword and placing on his shoulders a cloak of velvet, 'a garment of honour'. That April, John Beaufort would be made a Knight of the Garter. Formerly, he had borne a shield of blue and white (the Lancastrian livery colours, and now his own too) differenced by the red bend sinister of bastardy charged with the arms of Lancaster; now he took for his arms the quartered leopards and lilies of England with a segmented border in blue and white. It was probably at this time too that he adopted the famous portcullis badge that would later feature so prominently in Tudor heraldry. Katherine, the herald's daughter, must have felt wonderfully gratified to see her children legitimised and her son a belted earl. The wits of Richard II's court, however, derisively referred to the Beauforts as 'Fairborn', an interpretation of their name that was still being used ironically a century later, proof that the taint of bastardy still clung to the family. Notwithstanding this, the legitimisation of the Beauforts was to have massive implications for the future of the monarchy, and

indeed for the history of England itself.

The next day, 11 February, the King licensed John of Gaunt to settle a jointure on Katherine, namely the estates he had received from the Crown in 1372 in exchange for the earldom of Richmond. These lay mainly in Yorkshire, Norfolk and Sussex, and comprised the honours, castles and manors of Knaresborough and Tickhill, and the wapentake (hundred) of Staincliffe.all in Yorkshire; the hundreds of North Greenhoe, North and South Erpingham and Smithdon, in Norfolk; 200 marks (£23,601) annual rent from St Mary's Abbey, York; the castle, manor and free chase of the High Peak in Derbyshire; the manors of Gringley and Wheatley in Nottinghamshire, of which Katherine was already in possession; the manors of Willingdon and Maresfield in Sussex, Wighton, Aylsham, Fakenham and Snettisham in Norfolk, and those of Glatton and Holme in Cambridgeshire; Pevensey Castle and adjoining land in Sussex; Ashdown free chase and the bailiwick of Endlewick in Sussex; the advowsons of St Robert of Knaresborough and Tickhill; the free chapels of Castleton (High Peak), Maresfield and Pevensey Castle; and the priories of Wilmington and Withyam, both in Sussex.

Katherine was to hold all these properties for the term of her life, to ensure that she was securely provided for in the event of her being left a widow. On her death, they would revert to the heirs of the Duke's body, and not therefore to the Beauforts, thus preserving the Lancastrian inheritance intact.

Furthermore, during this year of 1397, John also arranged for some of that great inheritance to be held jointly by him and Katherine during their lives, a gesture that can only be viewed as a mark of his love and respect for her, and proof that their marriage was more than just a means of legitimising their children.

With her jointure settled, the Duchess left court with the Duke and travelled north to Pontefract once more. They were there on 17 March 1397, but had returned to London by 15 April, after perhaps having been present when Henry Beaufort was ordained as a deacon around 3—7 April. That month, Henry achieved the accolade of being appointed Chancellor of Oxford University.

The fortunes of Thomas Beaufort were also advanced at this time. On 6 July 1397, he was retained for life by the King with an annuity of 100 marks (£11,801), and by November of that year, he had married

Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Neville of Hornby and niece of Joan Beaufort's husband, Ralph Neville. She was then living in Katherine's household with a governess, and was considered too young as yet to cohabit with her husband.

Some writers assert that Katherine's daughter, Margaret Swynford, the nun at Barking, had died by 1397, for she is not listed among the sisters who took vows of obedience that year to the new Abbess in the presence of the Bishop of London, but she was still very much alive, for in 1419, she herself was elected Abbess of Barking, and in fact she survived until 1433, dying around the ripe age of seventy. Carvings of the names of Henry and Thomas Beaufort (with the date 1430) on surviving fragments of masonry from Barking Abbey, recorded in 1720, and a bequest of vestments by Thomas Beaufort in his will proved in 1427 are perhaps further evidence that Margaret, then Abbess, was their half-sister. Her cousin Elizabeth Chaucer did swear allegiance to the new Abbess in 1397, along with fourteen other well-born nuns,⁸ but that is the last surviving reference to her; her date of death is not recorded.

There is barely a mention of Katherine in the sources covering the remaining years of her marriage to John of Gaunt. We can only assume that she was living the traditional life of a royal duchess, concerning herself with household matters, charitable enterprises and pious works, overseeing the Swynford interests, involving herself in the lives of her children and being a 'dearly beloved companion' to her husband. As the mistress of many Lancastrian castles and manors, she would have found herself moving about the country more frequently than in the years of her widowhood, and living in far greater luxury than ever before. How could she not have made comparisons with how things had been when she had been John's mistress, or in the years of their separation? Now, having achieved the highest position to which she could ever have aspired, and won her man in the process, she seems to have been content to keep a low profile and remain to a great extent a background figure in his life, much as she had done in the past, when she was his mistress.

For most of the first eighteen months of her marriage, Katherine was often at court, where she enjoyed a prominent position, but political events were thereafter to overshadow her life with John, leading to tragedies that would deeply affect them both, and put their very lives in danger. Therefore it is necessary to digress and recount them here, even though Katherine was not directly involved.

John of Gaunt might have been high in favour with the King, who confirmed him as Duke of Aquitaine for life on 6 July 1397, but Richard, in whom resentment had simmered for a decade, was now determined to force a reckoning with the former Lords Appellant. He told John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley that he had received intelligence from Thomas Mowbray, himself a former Appellant, that their brother of Gloucester and the Earls of Arundel and Warwick were plotting to depose and imprison him. Plaintively, he asked for their advice. 'Their plan is to separate my Queen from me and shut her up in some place of confinement,' he told them, looking as if he were suffering great anguish of heart, and sounding very convincing. His uncles did their best to calm him down, saying they would never suffer their brother to harm either him or the Queen, and as Richard had hoped, they consented to the arrests of the plotters.

In fact, both Dukes were reluctant to take sides: quite simply, 'they did not wish to be involved'. John's overriding concern would have been for his son, who had collaborated with Gloucester, Arundel and Warwick back in 1387-8, and thus laid himself forever open to accusations of treason; and he would naturally have been anxious to safeguard the future of the Lancastrian dynasty. Thus, in order to avoid becoming further embroiled in the gathering storm, John and Edmund, with their families, immediately 'retired to their own castles, the Duke of Lancaster taking with him his Duchess, who had for some time been the companion of the young Queen of England'. Thus ended — for a time, at least — Katherine's close association with Isabella of Valois. Instead she found herself 'hunting stags and deer' with her husband. However, both Dukes were 'bitterly' to regret their decision to leave court at this crucial time, for it deprived them of their last chance to save their brother and avert a disturbing political crisis.

'Shortly after the Duke of Lancaster had gone away,' continues Froissart, 'the King decided upon a bold and daring move.' Gloucester, Arundel and Warwick were arrested, Richard apprehending his uncle in person. On 15 August, John of Gaunt was back at court and present in the House of Lords when the three nobles were accused of committing treason in 1387-8, and later that month, he and his son Henry of Derby were ordered to muster forces for the King.

Gloucester had been taken to Calais after his arrest, and he was almost certainly murdered there - suffocated in a feather bed — on the orders of the King, before 15 September. On 9 September, in a bid to retain John of Gaunt's support, Richard created John Beaufort — who was willingly to assist in the prosecution of the Appellants - Marquess of

both Somerset and Dorset. On 21 September, the three arrested Appellants were called upon to answer for their treason. Gloucester, of course, was not present; Arundel argued that he had been formally pardoned, but he was condemned all the same (with the Duke of Lancaster - as High Steward of England — pronouncing sentence), and beheaded the same day; Warwick, who had pleaded guilty and thrown himself on the King's mercy, escaped with forfeiture and life imprisonment. Three days later, Thomas Mowbray, another former Appellant, now Captain of Calais, announced in Parliament that Gloucester was dead.

John of Gaunt made no public protest about his brother's murder, even though, according to Froissart (whose evidence may not be reliable), he and Edmund held the King responsible for it, and planned to meet in London to discuss what action they should take; they had 'considerable support', but instead of speaking out, they made their peace with the King, having heard that he was growing suspicious of John of Gaunt too. Maybe John felt he had no choice, given that he was in fear for his son. 'But the common view was that they could have prevented the arrest of their brother, had they foreseen it.' This sinister episode effectively marks the end of John of Gaunt's active intervention in affairs of state, and indeed his political influence, and it may have coincided with — or exacerbated — the onset of failing health.

'So King Richard was reconciled with his uncles over the death of the Duke of Gloucester, and went on to rule more harshly than before.' Richard's ire did not, at that time, apparently extend to Henry of Derby, who had supported the proceedings against his former colleagues. Naturally, Richard had no wish at this time to alienate John of Gaunt, that stout bulwark of the throne. The King was Henry's guest during that September, and on the 29th, in a mass preferment of peers calculated to reward those who had supported him in the recent proceedings, he created his cousin Duke of Hereford. John of Gaunt's sons-in-law, John Holland and Ralph Neville were made Duke of Exeter and Earl of Westmorland respectively, and John Beaufort was granted eleven of Warwick's manors; on 20 November, he would be appointed Constable of Wallingford Castle for life.

Richard II's proceedings against the former Appellants mark the beginning of his descent into tyranny. He was done with being told how to govern his kingdom and was determined from now on to rule by divine right as an absolute monarch. In the process, he became obsessed with projecting his own majesty, and introduced increasingly

elaborate and rigid ceremonial and protocol at court. He would sit for hours crowned and silent on his high throne at Westminster, 'more splendidly and in greater state than any previous king', and 'if he looked on any man, he must kneel'.

'He began,' says Walsingham, 'to act the tyrant and oppress the people.' Crippled by debt because of his extravagant lifestyle, he imposed forced loans on his subjects, irrevocably alienating them in the process. As his unpopularity increased, he became paranoid about his own security, and instituted a large bodyguard of Cheshire archers to protect his person. In his own eyes, he could do no wrong. He was, he told Parliament, 'absolute Emperor of his kingdom of England'.

But his contemporaries knew him to be arrogant, rapacious, vindictive, cunning and vain; they hated and feared this new imperious Richard. Rumours persisted that Arundel, his head and body miraculously reunited, had been restored to life, so to put paid to them, on 1 October, John of Gaunt was assigned the unpleasant task of viewing Arundel's exhumed body in London; he and Katherine were probably staying at Ely Place at this time. By 1 November, John had gone north to Hertford with Katherine and his son, the new Duke of Hereford. The Duke and Duchess spent Christmas at Leicester, which must have afforded a welcome respite from the political turmoil at Westminster.

Henry had stayed in London. Some time in December, while riding to Windsor, he entered into a fateful conversation with Thomas Mowbray. Out of the blue, Mowbray startlingly revealed that four of the King's most favoured lords were plotting to kill Henry and his father the Duke when they came to Windsor after Parliament had risen in the New Year; the King would then seize the Lancastrian domains. It appeared that there were also secret moves afoot to reverse the pardon granted posthumously to the Duke's forebear, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, who had been executed by Edward II in 1322; if that happened, John of Gaunt would be disinherited. Mowbray feared that he and Henry 'were on the point of being undone, in revenge for what was done at Radcot Bridge', for he believed

Richard would not allow their treason as former Appellants to go unpunished, and could not be trusted to keep his oath.

There is some evidence to suggest that Mowbray was not exaggerating the danger. On 1 and 3 March 1398, one of Richard's most favoured

councillors, Sir William Bagot, MP for Warwickshire, entered into two sinister-sounding recognizances, the first for £1,000, to be forfeit from him should he 'in time to come make suit for disherision [disinheriting] of John, Duke of Lancaster, his wife or any of his children'; the second stated that 'if John, Duke of Guienne and Lancaster, his wife or any of his children shall in time to come be by him [Bagot] slain, upon proof thereof he shall be put to death without other judgement or process'. This looks like evidence of a plot to disinherit and murder not only John of Gaunt, but Katherine and their children, and it appears that Bagot was to be the scapegoat for whoever was behind the plot, should things go wrong. In 1399, under a new king, Bagot was to admit in court that he had once intrigued to assassinate the Duke, and there is some later evidence that Bagot, Mowbray and Richard II himself were the conspirators. It is unlikely, however, that Katherine ever discovered how close she herself had come to becoming the victim of an assassination attempt.

Henry reported this alarming exchange to John of Gaunt, who thought it best to tell the King about it. Naturally, given the nature of the conversation they had had, both Henry and Mowbray — who was outraged at his confidences being reported to Richard — wished to portray themselves in the best possible light, and each ended up accusing the other of treason before Richard. Adam of Usk claims that Mowbray himself - who had been implicated in the death of Gloucester, and perhaps believed that Henry's complaint was prompted by his father in reprisal for that, with a view to bringing Mowbray to grief — began plotting to murder John of Gaunt when the Duke travelled to Shrewsbury for the coming Parliament, but that the latter was warned and managed to escape the snare.

The strain told on John. At the beginning of February, after Parliament rose, he was suffering from a high fever, and was obliged to retire with Katherine to nearby Lilleshall Abbey for a couple of days to recuperate. By this time, he was, as he confided to the King in a letter, suffering from a recurrent illness that proved intermittently incapacitating, and this was probably one such attack. Lilleshall Abbey, where John rested with Katherine, was a remote but imposing Norman house of red sandstone founded by Arroasian (later Augustinian) canons in 1148 and extended in the thirteenth century. Extensive ruins remain today, and the west front is especially magnificent.

Confronted with the prospect of his own mortality, John was having to face the possibility that Richard II had designs on the Lancastrian

inheritance, and Katherine would certainly have shared in her husband's anxieties on that score, and indeed been concerned for him too. The King had already moved against three Lords Appellant, so what was there to stop him from proceeding against the other two? Even if he stopped short of indicting Henry for treason, he might yet use devious means to seize the Duchy for the Crown. As soon as he was well enough, John sought from Richard an assurance that he would not use the forfeiture of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, in 1322 as an excuse to appropriate the Duchy's lands, a request Richard readily granted.

So far, then, there had been no tangible evidence that the King was entertaining any sinister intentions towards the House of Lancaster. On 5 February, he again showed generosity to John Beaufort, appointing him to the prestigious offices of Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle, the key defensive fortress of the realm, and on 9 May Beaufort would be named Admiral of the North and West. In granting these offices, Richard was acknowledging John Beaufort to be one of the leading lords in the kingdom, a worthy son of his father.

John of Gaunt was evidently in better health by 5 February, for on that day the King again commissioned him to treat for peace with the Scots, and on the 20th, he was at Pontefract again, on his way north.⁵ He may have left Katherine there to await his return, for it is unlikely she accompanied him to Scotland, in view of the lawlessness of the Border regions.

There was much adverse comment when, on 27 February 1398, Henry Beaufort, a proud and ambitious young man of just twenty-one, was named Bishop of Lincoln by the King. He had been provided to the See by a bull of Pope Boniface DC, who was ever eager to gratify the wishes of the influential Duke of Lancaster, the Duke having shamelessly canvassed for the appointment; normally thirty was the minimum age for bishops. Even for the son of the mighty John of Gaunt, this was too rapid a promotion, and a flagrant abuse of the power of the Papacy. Evidently the aged Bishop Buckingham thought so too, because, rather than meekly submit to being translated to the less prestigious See of Coventry and Lichfield, ostensibly for the benefit of his health, but in reality to make way for his successor, he insisted on continuing with his episcopal duties in Lincoln up until 12 July that year. By then, he was too infirm to carry on anywhere, and was sent to live out his days in Canterbury, where he died on 10 March 1399. On 14 July 1398, having resigned as Chancellor of

Oxford and renounced most of his other offices in order to focus on his episcopate, Henry Beaufort was consecrated Bishop of Lincoln, receiving his temporalities five days later at Tutbury. He was to prove a typical career bishop, busy and competent in all his affairs, who would enjoy power within the State as well as the Church, and whose interests embraced both the secular and the sacred, yet who saw himself, before all else, as a Lancastrian prince. With his preferment, Katherine found herself the mother of a marquess, a countess and a bishop — attainments she could never at one time have dreamed of for her bastard children.

In the middle of March 1398, near Kelso John of Gaunt appointed deputies to serve on the northern Marches, then rode south, unaware that he had just completed his last diplomatic mission — appropriately in the interests of peace. From that time onwards, he was to play little part in public life, a clear indication that his health was failing fast, as is the sudden cessation of his witnessing royal charters in July 1398. Worry about his son must have been a contributory factor.

The quarrel between Henry and Mowbray was still unresolved, and for Richard II, this was a God-sent opportunity to press home his advantage, for he had come to see the House of Lancaster, with its enormous power and vast wealth, as a threat to himself and his throne, and was indeed resolved to neutralise it. On 19 March, the two protagonists again appeared before the King at Bristol, and since honour had to be satisfied and neither party was willing to be reconciled, the case was referred to the Court of Chivalry to consider a 'wager of battle'. John of Gaunt, 'greatly upset', according to Froissart, went to Westminster with Henry on 25 March, but he and Katherine had retired to Leicester by 14 April, and so John was consequently spared the ordeal of witnessing Richard II, on the 29th at Windsor, ordering that, since there were no witnesses to the fateful conversation, the issues between Henry and Mowbray be settled by judicial combat between the protagonists — an outdated but still legal (until 1819) process whereby guilt was apportioned to the man left dead or disabled, or the one who ended the fight by crying 'Craven!' In this case, 'the duel was to be a matter of life and death'.

Henry raced north to break the news to his father and to hone his skills for the coming fight. John of Gaunt now faced the terrible prospect of his beloved son and heir being killed and branded a traitor, but on the other hand, Henry was an expert swordsman and jousting, and his father may have been optimistic as to the outcome.

For all that, the Duke 'was much annoyed and disturbed' by the King's actions, although he did not wish to say a word against Richard because Henry's honour was involved, as was his own. A sense of disaster threatening may well have overshadowed the family's time at Pontefract, where they resided from at least 9 June until 14 July, before removing to Rothwell. It would appear that Richard was unaware of his uncle's increasing frailty, for at the beginning of July he renewed his commission as Lieutenant of the Marches.

Early in August, Henry received word that the trial by combat would take place on 16 September. Richard may have been trying to lull John of Gaunt into a false sense of security when, on the 8th, he confirmed and extended his powers in the palatinate of Chester, upgraded the earldom of Chester to a principality and appointed the Duke its hereditary constable. But this was to be the last public office ever granted to John, whose relinquishment of the Duchy of Aquitaine that year suggests an awareness that he was no longer able to bear the responsibilities that possession of that turbulent domain entailed. In his place, at the end of August, the ever-upwardly mobile John Beaufort was appointed King's Lieutenant in Aquitaine for seven years.

At last, 16 September dawned, the day everyone concerned had been awaiting or dreading, and the two protagonists faced each other at Gosford Green, Coventry, with the King (who was lodging at Sir William Bagot's house), the young Queen, the Duke and Duchess of Lancaster, the whole court and vast crowds of sightseers looking on. But as the contestants sat there on their steeds, poised to charge, the King threw down his staff and forbade them to proceed. Instead, they were summoned to kneel before him, and without further preliminaries, he sentenced Henry to ten years' banishment, and Mowbray to exile for life. Both were commanded to leave England by 20 October. At a stroke, Richard had rid himself of the two remaining Appellants.

'The whole court was in a state of turmoil.' The summary sentences — handed down without any charges being made or any form of trial — stunned everyone and provoked much criticism of the King, not the least because Henry was 'extraordinarily popular' in England. At last Richard had revealed his hand, showing that he had meant all along to have his revenge on every one of the former Appellants. On the plea of John of Gaunt, he did immediately reduce the term of Henry's banishment to six years, but he was otherwise implacable. Banishing Henry and Mowbray had been a clever move on his part, for he must have been aware by now that the Duke did not have much longer to

live, and with Henry abroad at the time his father died — as he surely would be — it would be far easier for the King to appropriate the vast Lancastrian estates.

For John of Gaunt and his son, however, it was a tragedy, for it meant that Henry had to leave his father, with whom he had always enjoyed a touchingly warm relationship, at a time when the latter's health was failing fast and it must have been obvious that the prospect of their meeting again in this life was remote indeed. John may have made this point, to no purpose, in his plea to the King. More than that, the future security of the Lancastrian patrimony, which for over thirty years the Duke had preserved and enriched as the inheritance he would leave his son and the heirs of his dynasty, was now clearly under threat. Many historians have observed that he made no public protest; Froissart says that he 'was very angry and felt that the King should not have reacted as he had ... And the more sensible of the barons agreed with him.' Nevertheless, while he 'deplored the matter in private, [he] was too proud to approach Richard II, since his son's honour was involved'. That is understandable, but, given the King's unpredictable humour, probably he did not dare to protest, for to do so might only worsen the situation, and so much was at stake. He had, after all, pleaded with the King in private, and failed to soften his resolve.

The prospect of death was undoubtedly in John's mind at this time, for on 17 September, only one day after Richard pronounced his terrible judgement, the Duke obtained from him a licence to found a chantry for himself and Katherine in Lincoln Cathedral, where their souls could be prayed for in perpetuity by two chaplains. When his time came, John would be buried in the double tomb he had built for himself and Blanche in St Paul's, but he desired to retain a spiritual affinity in death with Katherine, who must already have decided that she would be laid to rest in Lincoln Cathedral, a place with which she had long enjoyed a close association, and where she and John had been married. That she had the right to burial there is perhaps further evidence that she was a member of the cathedral's confraternity, although her long residence in the Close might have qualified her for the privilege, and her royal status.

After their marriage, John and Katherine had forged even closer links with Lincoln Cathedral. They bestowed rich gifts. In his will, John left a gold chalice graven with a crucifix and an image of Christ, a gold table, large gold chandeliers and a stone altar he called 'Domesday' that was encrusted with sapphires, diamonds, pearls and rubies, all of

which were from his own chapel, as well as new vestments of red cloth of gold adorned with gold falcons, and an altar cloth with the images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the twelve Apostles embroidered in gold thread.

During her marriage and widowhood, Katherine too gave beautiful vestments, some from her own chapel; these comprised 'a chasuble of red baudekin [rich silk] with orphreys [ornamental bands or borders] of gold with leopards powdered [sprinkled] with black trefoils, and two tunics and two albs of the same suite'; twenty 'fair copes', each having 'three wheels of silver in the hoods;... a chasuble of red velvet with Katherine wheels of gold, with two tunics and three albs, with all the apparel of the same suite;... five copes of red velvet with Katherine wheels of gold, of the which three hath orphreys of black cloth of gold, and the other two hath orphreys with images of Katherine wheels and stars'. There were also four other copes 'in red satin figured with Katherine wheels of gold, with orphreys having images, staffs and Katherine wheels', and 'two cloths of red velvet embroidered with Katherine wheels of gold of divers lengths and divers breadths'. All were 'of the gift of the Duchess of Lancaster', and they were recorded in an inventory taken in 1536, when they were still proudly numbered among the cathedral's treasures. These descriptions give some indication of the splendour in which the Duke and Duchess worshipped, while the proliferation of Katherine wheels testifies to the Duchess's desire to be identified with her patron saint.

Immediately after obtaining his licence from the King, John rode with Katherine to Leicester Castle. To show that he bore the Duke no ill will for the misdeeds of his son, Richard visited them there from 20 to 24 September, and on the last day of his stay, he granted Mowbray's lordship of Castle Acre in Norfolk to Thomas Beaufort. Were these sops to lull John into believing that Richard had no further moves against the House of Lancaster planned?

During his visit, Richard must have seen a deterioration in John of Gaunt's health. For some time, says Froissart, John was 'low spirited on account of the banishment of his son', and he was clearly not a well man. Although on 3 October Richard was apparently anticipating that his uncle might undertake another trip to Scotland in 1399, this was perhaps a ploy to make people believe he thought the Duke would live to see his son return from exile, in order to deflect any suspicions that he had his eye on their lands; for on that same day, he went so far as to issue letters authorising Henry to receive his inheritance in the event of John's early demise.

Katherine was probably present with John at Eltham Palace that month to witness Henry taking his leave of the King. Their own sad farewells were made soon afterwards, and on 13 March, Henry, riding through vast crowds of people 'weeping and crying after him', left London for Dover, where he was to board a ship bound for France. On his father's advice, he had arranged to spend his exile in Paris, at the French court, near enough to England for him to be able speedily to return if necessary.

John of Gaunt, now overtaken 'by a sudden languor, both for old age and heaviness [depression]', and 'gravely desolated' by the absence of his son and the prospect of never seeing him again, rode north with his beloved Katherine to Leicester Castle, arriving there by 24 October. He would not leave this long-favoured residence alive. As Silva-Vigier and

Goodman point out, the greater part of his short married life with Katherine had been darkly overshadowed by Richard II's tyranny and latterly the Duke's sickness — and there was to be no happy ending. In November, his health deteriorated, and at Christmas, according to Froissart, he became very ill. It may have been at this time that he took to 'his chamber bed, travailed in that infirmity'. This was by far the worst manifestation of the illness he had suffered from intermittently for at least a year, a malady that some believed had been brought on or exacerbated by the strain of recent events.

The nature of that illness cannot be determined for certain, but there are possible clues. The following 'indecent tale' was deemed so disgusting by the Duke's Edwardian biographer, Armitage-Smith, that he had the whole text, and his own dismissive observations, printed in Latin; later historians, such as Pearsall and Bevan, have also cast doubt on its credibility. But were they right to do so? A closer look at the evidence is required.

In the 1440s, Thomas Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford University, claimed in his treatise *Loci e libro veritatum* (*Passages from a book of truths*) that John of Gaunt 'died of putrefaction of his genitals and body, caused by the frequenting of women, for he was a great fornicator'. According to Gascoigne, Richard II visited John of Gaunt as he was 'lying thus diseased in bed', and the Duke 'showed this same putrefaction' to the King, laying bare his corrupted genitals and other parts. Gascoigne, who attributed this illness to 'the exercise of carnal intercourse with women', and who says he got his information from 'a faithful student of theology who knew these things and told them to

me', wrote this passage to illustrate his typically clerical theory that excessive sexual intercourse had dire consequences for men; yet it seems strange that the private shame of the Duke of Lancaster, the great-grandfather of the then-reigning King and the progenitor of his dynasty, should be chosen as an exemplar and thus exposed. Surely Gascoigne would have had to be sure of his facts before writing something so injurious to the Duke's posthumous reputation?

Armitage-Smith observed that Gascoigne, a respected and honest preacher who was vehement in his opposition to Lollards, was biased against the Duke, who had once been notorious for his support of Wycliffe. But there is some evidence that may corroborate his allegations. Richard II *was* in the Midlands in January 1399, so it is possible that he did visit his uncle. One source asserts that not only did Richard visit John at this time, but that John raged at him for exiling his son, while the Scottish chronicler, Andrew Wyntoun, writing two decades later, has Richard speaking courteously to him with 'pleasant words of comfort', the effect of which was promptly spoiled when he threw unpaid bills on the Duke's deathbed.

If Gascoigne's story is true, there were enormous implications for Katherine. First, we know that her marriage had been consummated in 1396, so there is the possibility that she herself had been infected with the venereal disease contracted by her husband. The fact that she outlived John by only four years, mostly in retirement, may be significant. Second, the worsening symptoms of John's illness would have put paid to any lovemaking between them. Third, there was the emotional impact on Katherine, who would have had to come to terms with the ghastly consequences of her husband's earlier promiscuity, a constant reminder that he had not been faithful to her in former years. Maybe, though, she had long since reconciled herself to that, and forgiven it, as it was her Christian duty to do. But watching her dearly beloved lord die in agony can only have been painful in the extreme.

Yet what of any corroborating evidence? That may perhaps be found in the great St Cuthbert window in the south choir aisle of York Minster, which was gifted between c.1430 and c.1445 by the Duke's former clerk, favoured protegee and executor, Thomas Langley, Bishop of Durham and Dean of York, who owed his early advancement in the Church largely to John's patronage, knew him very well, was much respected by his son and grandson, and was Lord Chancellor under three Lancastrian kings. John of Gaunt had been a devotee of St Cuthbert, and he appears in this window, kneeling at a prayer-desk. On it is a book displaying the Latin text of the first line of Psalm 38:

'O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure.'

Of course, it might be that Langley wished purely to emphasise the devout - and conventional — contrition of his former patron for any sins he had committed, but a reading of the entire psalm may reveal Langley's inside knowledge of what the Duke had really suffered. In particular, verse 3: 'There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger, nor is there any rest in my bones because of my sin'; verse 5: 'My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness'; verse 7: 'For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: there is no soundness in my flesh'; verse 8: 'I am feeble and sore broken'; and verse 10: 'My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me' — had John indeed gone blind towards the end? The psalm also refers to his enemies laying snares for him and saying mischievous things, which could well refer to the events of 1397—8. Saddest of all, perhaps, in this context, is verse 11: 'My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.' Does this, with its specific reference to 'lovers', suggest that Katherine herself could not bear to go too near John in his extremity? Probably not, for Froissart says of Katherine, 'She loved the Duke of Lancaster ... and she showed it, in life and in death.'

Langley must have known the words of this psalm well, as would many other clerics and educated people; why else would he — normally a man of discretion, and utterly loyal to the House of Lancaster — have used it, with all its references to a physical rather than spiritual malaise, unless he knew it to be especially apt? And why, if the Duke had not had such a disease, did Langley choose to draw attention to this particular text?

Given that John of Gaunt may have died of a venereal disease, what could it have been? The only symptoms described or perhaps alluded to were intermittent attacks of illness in the late 1390s, putrefying genitals and blindness. Syphilis was then unknown in Europe; it is thought to have been introduced from the Americas in the late fifteenth century. Gonorrhoea, however, had been known from ancient times, as had other sexually transmitted diseases such as non-specific urethritis and chlamydia. John is likeliest to have contracted such an illness in the years prior to 1381, when he reached forty-one, and in many cases symptoms do not appear for some years. When they do appear, men can suffer painful urination, swollen testicles, a whitish discharge from the penis, infection and reddening of its opening, genital itching and infertility - it may be significant that the Duke

fathered no more children after 1385. His children need not necessarily have inherited the disease, because their mothers were probably not infected — at least not at the time they gave birth. Moreover, John seems, however, to have been a generally fit man up until his fifties, apart from nearly dying of dysentery in Spain in 1387. In later life, however, untreated venereal diseases can cause arthritis, rheumatism, prostatitis, heart problems, meningitis, paralysis and/or blindness.

None of this is conclusive, and against it, of course, we may argue that, had John of Gaunt died of a venereal disease, it would have merited some mention by other chroniclers. Given the private nature of such a disease, however, it may be that the only people who perhaps knew the truth about the Duke's illness were members of his inner circle — Langley may have been present at his deathbed, and might possibly have been the 'faithful student of theology' who confided in Gascoigne — and that they kept it to themselves until he had been dead for at least thirty years.

Over in Paris, an anxious Duke Henry was told by one of his knights, Sir John Dymoke, whom he had sent as a messenger to his father, that the Duke's physicians had said he was suffering from such a dangerous disease that he could not live for long. This alarming report dissuaded Henry from visiting the courts of Castile and Portugal, where his sisters were established, and from going on pilgrimage to St James of Compostela. Who knew when he might enter his inheritance, or even be permitted to return to pay his last respects to his dying parent?

On New Year's Day 1399, Katherine presented John with a gold cup, her last gift to him. On 6 January, the Feast of the Epiphany, the Duke sent to Lincoln Cathedral the treasures he intended to bequeath to it in his will, instructing that they be exhibited on the high altar. Clearly he believed he was laying up treasure in Heaven also.

At this time, Henry Beaufort was in Oxford, serving on a committee advising the Crown. Since he was to escort his mother south after his father's death, he may have hastened to Leicester to be with the Duke at the end. There is no record of John's other children being present, so perhaps it was only Katherine and the young Bishop who kept vigil by the sickbed.

On 3 February 1399, John of Gaunt had his extremely detailed and meticulously thought-out will drawn up, the complexity of which is evidence that his mental faculties remained acute until the last. He

began by commending his soul to God 'and to His very sweet mother St Mary, and to the joys of Heaven', and directing that his body be buried in St Paul's Cathedral 'next to my former dear companion Blanche'. He made provision for the eternal celebration of his obit and those of 'my very dear former companions, Blanche and Constance, whom God preserve', and left handsome sums to churches, religious houses and prisons.

Then came his lavish bequests to his Duchess, which are surely further evidence of his love for her. 'I leave to my very dear wife and companion, Katherine, the two best *nowches* [ouches] which I own, after the *nowche* which I leave to my esteemed lord and nephew, the King.' An ouche was a brooch or a setting for a precious stone; the word derives from the mediaeval Latin *nusca*, meaning an ornament. John also left Katherine 'my largest gold chalice', which the King had given him, 'together with all the gold chalices which she herself has previously given to me' — a touching insight, this, into private gifts revealing shared devotional interests. Katherine was bequeathed too 'all the sacred images, buckles, rings, diamonds, rubies and other things which are to be found in a small cypress casket which I have, and to which I myself carry the key. After my death this will be found in the purse which I carry also on my person. 'These must have been John's most cherished and personal possessions.

'I leave further [to Katherine] a complete vestment of cloth of gold, the bed and the furnishings, with all the copes, carpets for the chamber, cushions, pillows, embroidered cloths for the tomb and all other pieces belonging thereto, having a red ground diapered with a black trellis and, at each intersection of the diaper, a gold rose, with the letter M' in black and black leopards in alternate sections of it. And to her also, I leave my great bed of black velvet embroidered with iron compasses and garters and a turtle dove in the middle of the compasses, together with the carpets and hangings and cushions etc. belonging to the same bed and chamber.' This must have been one of the couple's nuptial beds, and its symbols further express their piety: the compass symbolised the Creator measuring out the world; the dove was a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

John also left Katherine 'all the other beds made for me, called in England "trussing beds" [portable beds with hangings], with the carpets and other appurtenances, and my best circlet with the fine ruby, and my best collar with the cluster of diamonds, and my second cover of ermine, and two of my best ermine-lined mantles, together with the suits of clothes accompanying them. And to the said most

dear companion, I leave all those possessions and castles which she had before our marriage, together with the other property and jewels which I have given to her since the said marriage, and, finally, those possessions and jewels which are in the keeping of my said companion and not listed in the inventory of my possessions'. Later in the will, Katherine was left £2,000 (£758,325) - by far the largest bequest made by the Duke.

All of this gives a very vivid impression of the luxury in which Katherine had lived as Duchess of Lancaster, but it also paints a picture of a mutually supportive married couple, a generous husband and an esteemed and loved wife. When John had gone, Katherine would want for nothing, and she would have many reminders of him to cherish: beds they had shared, personal jewels and rich garments.

To the King, John bequeathed, amongst other things, 'my best covered gold chalice, which my dearest Lady Katherine gave to me on New Year's Day'. There were generous bequests to his elder children: hangings, beds, armour, plate and jewels to Henry, a circlet and a chalice for Philippa, a covered gold chalice for Catalina, a bed, carpets and an ouche for Elizabeth. As for the Beauforts: 'I leave to my very dear son, John Beaufort, Marquess of Dorset, two dozen plates and two dozen saucers, two goblets of silver for wine, a silver chalice engraved, two basins and two ewers of silver,' plus £1,000 (£379,163). 'To the reverend Father in God and my beloved son, the Bishop of Lincoln [who was to be a supervisor of the will], a dozen plates and a dozen saucers, two silver goblets for wine, a silver chalice engraved, with a basin and one silver ewer, and my entire vestment of velvet with the things belonging to it, and also my missal and my psalter, which belonged to my lord and brother, the Prince of Wales, whom God preserve. I leave to my very dear son, Thomas Beaufort, their brother, a dozen plates and a dozen saucers, two silver goblets for wine and six silver cups,' and 1,000 marks (£126,388). 'I leave to my very dear daughter, their sister, the Countess of Westmorland and Lady Neville, a bed of silk and a covered gold chalice, also a ewer.'

The will also reveals that the Duke generously left 'my very dear chevalier Sir Thomas Swynford' 100 marks (£12,639). He also directed that a chantry be founded at Leicester for the repose of his soul and that of 'my former very dear wife Constance'. In a codicil to the will, added after it had been sealed, he granted Katherine 'some portion' of 'divers seigneuries, manors, lands, building, rent, services, possessions or benefices from churches' that he had purchased 'before the marriage between myself and my very dear companion, Katherine,

was celebrated'; she was to hold these for life, and 'some portion' of their revenues was to 'remain completely hers ... in her hands'. The rest was to go to John Beaufort, for himself and his heirs, while revenues from other property held by Katherine but not part of this grant were to be paid to Thomas Beaufort.

John of Gaunt died later that day, 3 February 1399, at Leicester Castle, aged fifty-eight. The fact that he left the drawing up of his long will until what proved to be his last day on earth, and in it mentioned the possible eventuality of his dying outside London, suggests that he expected to live longer and even recover sufficiently to be able to return to that city, and that the end came after he took a sudden turn for the worse. His death ended one of the greatest and most poignant love affairs in English history. It left his son Henry - now Duke of Lancaster, Earl of Leicester, Lincoln and Derby — in possession of a landed inheritance worth more than £43 billion in modern terms, and Katherine a widow for the second time. She now, at forty-nine, donned once more the robes of widowhood, robes in which she is depicted on her tomb brass, which are similar to those worn by her sister-in-law, Eleanor de Bohun, on her brass in Westminster Abbey. They comprised a long flowing gown, a barbe, a wimple and a veil. By this date, it had become de rigueur for royal and noble widows from the rank of baroness upwards to wear the pleated barbe above the chin, ladies of knightly rank or lower being obliged to wear it below. Katherine, as a dowager duchess, would have worn it covering her chin, with the nun-like wimple falling over her shoulders. On public occasions, she may have worn a ducal coronet on top of the wimple. Noble widows such as Katherine usually wore this garb until they died or remarried.

In his will, John had left instructions that, like Job, 'my body should remain on the earth for forty days', uninterred. This was not only an exercise in humility and penitence that was typical of its time, but also gave the executors time in which to arrange the obsequies. The embalmed body would have been placed in a coffin in the castle chapel, where Katherine would surely have regularly kept vigil beside it: again, we may recall Froissart saying that she showed her love for the Duke in death.

Early in March, the Duke's corpse was brought south to London in solemn procession. Katherine, as chief mourner, was escorted by her son, Bishop Beaufort, and Robert Braybrooke, Bishop of London, an old friend of her husband. On 12 March, the body was to rest overnight at St Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire, but when the cortege

arrived, the Abbot refused to admit anyone, or assign lodgings to any of the mourners, because of Beaufort's presence, fearing that, if the latter were allowed to officiate at the Requiem Mass, the Abbey's cherished exemption from his episcopal jurisdiction might be compromised. An undignified row ensued, and was only resolved when, at Braybrooke's urging, the outraged Bishop undertook to indemnify the Abbey against any derogation of its immunities. Only then would the Abbot admit everyone and himself insisted on celebrating the Requiem Mass with the two bishops. The following day, Bishop Beaufort graciously - and diplomatically — confirmed the Abbey's privileges. But it took the gift of a precious reliquary, presented on his next visitation, to mollify him.

On the evening of 13 March, the Duke's body rested in the Abbey's chapel of St John at Bar net, and the following day it was carried to London and - according to his wish — brought to the church of the Carmelites, his favoured order of friars, south of Fleet Street, 'to have exequies sung that same night and Requiem Mass the following morning'. Today, an inn, the Old Cheshire Cheese in Wine Office Court, stands on the site of the Whitefriars' guesthouse where Katherine probably lodged, unless nearby Ely Place had been made ready for her.

On 15 March, the hearse was borne to St Paul's for a final nocturnal vigil. Then, forty days after his death, on Passion Sunday, 16 March, in the presence of the King and all the nobility, and following a final Requiem Mass, John of Gaunt was laid to rest with great honours beside his once-beloved Blanche in the 'incomparable sepulchre' Henry Yevele had built for them near the high altar. At the committal, twenty-five large candles were grouped symbolically around the coffin: ten for the Ten Commandments, seven for the Seven Works of Charity, five for the Five Wounds of Christ, and three for the Holy Trinity. The chantry chapel in which the tomb was housed was finally completed by March 1403, and the chantry was formally founded on 20 December 1411. The chapel was sumptuously appointed with vestments, altar cloths and hangings left by the Duke, and a silver and enamelled cross 'of renowned beauty' presented by Bishop Beaufort.

The Duke's grandson, eleven-year-old Henry of Monmouth, the future Henry V, may have represented his exiled father, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, at the funeral - he and his siblings were all issued with black mourning robes — but it is just possible that Duke Henry, who had immediately put his Parisian household into mourning, had covertly hastened back from Paris to attend it himself, in disguise, for

three warrants issued under his privy seal were dated in London on 17, 18 and 20 March.

"The King's Mother"

With all the preparations for the Duke's obsequies and the sorting out of affairs following his death, Katherine can have had little time to mourn. Now, with the funeral behind her, she faced life alone without the man she had loved for more than thirty years.

Before she could make any decisions about her future, she had to look to her financial affairs. Immediately following the Duke's death, the royal escheators had wrongfully taken into custody her dower lands along with the Lancastrian estates, so Katherine had to petition Richard II to restore them to her, which he did promptly on 9 March. He also confirmed an annuity of £1,000 (£379,163) charged upon the Duchy lands, which had been granted to her by John of Gaunt. But on 18 March, the King did what had no doubt been in his mind for some time: without any legal pretext, he extended Henry's exile for the term of his life, and declared the Lancastrian inheritance forfeit, annexing the Duchy to the Crown, and distributing its lands among his favourites. It was a shocking turn of events, and one of the grossest examples of Richard's tyrannical rule.

The King had shed no tears for his late uncle, and had even communicated his passing to Charles VI 'with a sort of joy'. Yet his affection for Katherine and her family is evident in the measures he took to mitigate the impact of the forfeiture on them. He allowed Katherine to keep the lands left to her for her dower, and when in May his escheators — whose zeal far exceeded their competence — seized lands in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Norfolk that she had held before her marriage to the Duke, he ordered that these lands be released to her. Thereafter, she made no known protest about the forfeiture of the Lancastrian inheritance, kept very much to herself and thus managed to remain on good terms with the King.

On 20 March, Richard confirmed the annuity of 100 marks that John of Gaunt had granted in 1383 to Thomas Swynford and his wife, and the same day he compensated Thomas Chaucer for the loss of the offices granted him by the late Duke. John Beaufort was scheduled to go to Aquitaine at the beginning of April, but the King postponed his departure and kept him in attendance at court; on 16 April he was one

of the witnesses of Richard's will. Perhaps John took advantage of the respite to help his mother settle her affairs, or to be a moral support to her at this time of mourning. In April, Richard provided Garter robes for Joan Beaufort and Jane Crophill, Thomas Swynford's wife. Katherine was not among those for whom such robes were provided - she would not have been expected to attend the Garter ceremonies so early in her widowhood.

Katherine did not choose to reside at any of her dower properties. She probably visited them rarely, if at all, for there is little or no trace of her at any of them, and of course she only held them for a short time; their function was chiefly to provide her with an income from rents and feudal dues. Instead, she went back to the cathedral close in Lincoln, where she had sought refuge at the time of that earlier parting from John, and which had evidently come to represent home to her. In absenting herself from London and the court, she removed herself from the turmoil of political life that had engulfed her last years with John, and hopefully in so doing found a kind of peace.

Having arranged for Thomas Swynford to take over the running of Kettlethorpe and Coleby, she leased one of the most desirable houses in Minster Yard, the one known today as the Priory. The exact date on which she took up residence there is not recorded, but it must have been early on in her widowhood; she was certainly renting the house in 1400-1, and held it until she died.⁷ She did not pay the rent of 46s.8d (£869) per annum, but opted instead to make repairs to the house, which may have given her something on which to focus during her widowhood.

The Priory is now a private school, and it was not known by that name until the early nineteenth century, when it housed an earlier school for young ladies, which was established by 1824; however, it will henceforth be referred to as the Priory for ease of reference. The present house is set back from the street and somewhat isolated from the other houses, standing against the fortified wall that was built around the cathedral close in the early fourteenth century, and lying to the north of the Chancery, further along Pottergate. In Katherine's day, the New Gate of the close stood outside the house, next to which was the Priory's own, smaller gatehouse, long since demolished; the cathedral's octagonal Chapter House is opposite.

As with the Chancery, a parliamentary survey, drawn up in 1649, exists for the Priory, providing us with many valuable details about the property leased by Katherine. The Priory's largely Victorian

exterior conceals the core of the thirteenth-century house lived in by Katherine, which had once been a canon's residence; there had been a tenement on the site since the twelfth century. The remains of the 'fair hall 40' long and 22' broad with walls between two and three feet thick, which dates from the late thirteenth century, are incorporated in the present house, along with sections of its walls and two of its original entrance doorways, while at the screens end there survives between two pointed-arched doors an imposing stone buffet delicately sculpted with ball flowers and a frieze of quatrefoils, which is built into the stone wall. There is also a carved basin for the washing of hands. The survey records 'a buttery or cellar at the lower end of the hall, and at the upper end a fair parlour wainscoted, 28' long and 21' broad, with a closet adjoining'. This parlour probably occupied Katherine's original solar wing at the south end of the hall, where she would have had her private chambers. Like that in the Chancery, the hall would have been open to the roof-beams in the fourteenth century, with a *louvre* to let out smoke from the central hearth. In this wing, there was also, in 1649, 'one other beer cellar there with pantry and buttery', and among the rooms on the second floor, above the parlour, was a 'chapel chamber', which probably dated from at least Katherine's day, for a household oratory had been licensed in 1259.

When the close wall was built, around 1316—28, a strong three-storeyed stone tower with its own spiral staircase, octagonal chimney shaft and embattled parapet was built into it, Unking it with the north side of the hall of the Priory, and forming part of the house. The parliamentary survey describes how the stone stairs led up to 'two lodging rooms', which may have been guest chambers or accommodation for household officers. The contemporary chimney shaft, rare in such houses, suggests an unusual degree of comfort and privacy for its time, while a small extension to the east side of the tower, which has traces of mediaeval windows, may have housed latrines. The ground-floor room, which has mullioned windows, was probably used as a buttery and pantry. There is now no fireplace in the first-floor chamber (now the music room), but this was clearly an important room because it still boasts windows surmounted by ogee arches on both sides, which would have been there when Katherine leased the property. It may be that all trace of the original hearth has been lost. The second-floor room has one window with an ogee arch, and a fireplace with a chamfered stone lintel that was uncovered in 1966.

In those days, a long range of buildings abutted the close wall between the gatehouse and the Priory itself, but all that survives are a

row of corbels. In the seventeenth century, these comprised a brewhouse, stable and hayloft; they may have served as stables in Katherine's time. The surveyors mention 'an orchard and garden adjoining on the south side of the said dwelling, walled about with stone walls', which occupied about two acres, and yards of a similar size.

The Priory was largely rebuilt around 1670, when the staircase in the tower was replaced, and new windows and a porch were added in Victorian times.

Its proportions and architectural features show that, in the fourteenth century, the Priory had clearly been a house of some distinction, and after Katherine had filled it with the sumptuous beds, furnishings and treasures left to her by John of Gaunt, it would have been splendid indeed, and a fitting residence for the Dowager Duchess of Lancaster.

That Katherine enjoyed good relations with the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln during her widowhood is strongly suggested by her decision to live among them, the rich gifts she made to the cathedral, and the fact that one canon, John Dalton, left her a silver cup in his will.

There are all too few references to Katherine during the period of her widowhood. She lived out a quiet existence in Lincoln, taking no part in public life, and playing no role in the cataclysmic events that were to take place later in 1399. She seems to have retained an interest in Kettlethorpe, and it may have been she who, in the absence of Thomas Swynford, provided a new rector there, William Wylingham, on 16 July that year. Professor Goodman suggests that Kettlethorpe, with its frequently flooded meadow, may have been too damp for comfort for the middle-aged Katherine," so she may not have been there very often.

Her sons, however, were to become increasingly involved in the political life of the kingdom. When Richard II went campaigning in Ireland in June, Henry Beaufort was in his train, looking after his nephew, Henry of Monmouth. John Beaufort, meanwhile, was raising a force to take to Aquitaine, but he would soon be deploying it in England instead.

For, in seizing the Lancastrian inheritance, Richard had made a fatal blunder, spurring an outraged Henry, Duke of Lancaster, to vigorous action. With a small force of retainers, he left Paris and sailed for England, landing at Ravenspur on the Humber estuary on 4 July,

intent on recovering what was rightfully his and unseating the tyrannical King. He advanced unopposed through the Lancastrian lands in the north, took York, and rallied Joan Beaufort's husband, Ralph Neville, to his cause. John Beaufort, on the other hand, while secretly writing to Henry to declare his support, publicly declared for Richard and joined the army that Edmund of Langley raised to defend the King. But Henry swept all before him, and at the end of July, Richards forces surrendered to the conqueror.

At that point, an alarmed Richard returned from Ireland, but his cause was already lost. On 19 August, he was captured at Conway and taken a prisoner to the Tower. The first thing the victorious Henry of Lancaster did when he arrived in London was pay his respects at his father's tomb in St Paul's.

Henry and Thomas Beaufort, Ralph Neville and Thomas Swynford all hastened to declare their allegiance to Henry. On 29 September, Richard was forced to abdicate, and the next day, standing before his father's seat in Westminster Hall, Henry challenged the realm of England and was proclaimed King, the first sovereign of the House of Lancaster. Technically he was a usurper, but the heir nearest in blood to the throne, Edmund Mortimer, a descendant of Lionel of Antwerp, was a child of only eight, so there was no viable alternative.

The new King was crowned on 13 October in Westminster Abbey. With his accession, the great Duchy of Lancaster became vested in the Crown (and remains so today), and almost immediately afterwards Henry confirmed John of Gaunt's bequests to Katherine Swynford.¹ There had always been a deep affection between the former Henry of Derby and his stepmother; Katherine had long played a maternal role in Henry's life, and is known to have referred to him as her 'son', while he now began officially calling her 'the King's mother' — a term he was under no obligation to use — as is evidenced in a grant he made to her on 9 November, of four barrels of wine a year for life.

The affection in which Henry held Katherine and her family is evident in his generosity towards them. In 1398, Geoffrey Chaucer had resigned his office of forester and returned to London; now he and his son Thomas immediately made known their loyalty to the new King. Of course, Henry and Geoffrey were old acquaintances, friends even - only five years earlier, Henry had given the poet money and a scarlet gown lined with fur. He evidently thought so highly of him that on the very day of his coronation, he doubled his pension — a mark of high favour perhaps prompted by Chaucer's humorous 'A Complaint to

his Purse', a plaintive, tongue-in-cheek plea of penury. The King also confirmed a grant made to Chaucer by Richard II in October 1398, of an annual tun of wine. On 14 October, Henry IV also confirmed John of Gaunt's 1383 annuity to Sir Thomas and Lady Swynford, and on the 31st he granted Thomas custody of Somerton Castle in Lincolnshire.

Thomas Chaucer was appointed Constable of Wallingford Castle on 16 October, and made Sheriff of Oxfordshire in 1400. His impressive career in public life owed much to Lancastrian patronage and to the connection of his aunt, Katherine Swynford, with John of Gaunt. He served as Chief Butler to four monarchs - Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI - being reappointed by Henry IV in 1402. Between 1401 and 1431, he would sit as MP for Oxfordshire in fourteen parliaments, and he was Speaker four times between 1407 and 1414. A justice of the peace, diplomat, successful vintner, landowner and shrewd investor, he became 'immensely rich' and greatly respected.

Of his brother Lewis, far less is known. He is last recorded in 1403 as serving as a member of the garrison at Carmarthen Castle with Thomas Chaucer.

Late in October, the former King Richard was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, and soon afterwards he was taken to Pontefract Castle, spending a night en route at Katherine's castle of Knaresborough. At Pontefract, Sir Thomas Swynford, Henry IV's highly trusted former comrade-in-arms, was one of his guardians. John Holland, who had remained loyal to his half-brother, Richard, was deprived of the dukedom of Exeter, and on 3 November, John Beaufort, who had also publicly supported the former King, was deprived of the marquessate of Somerset, being relegated to the rank of earl. There were calls for his execution, but Henry produced the private letters that John had sent him, expressing his fidelity, and on 7 November he made him his chamberlain during his pleasure, 'trusting in his loyalty and prudence', and admitted him to the royal Council. On the 18th, Thomas Beaufort was granted three manors by the King, and in 1400 he would be made a Knight of the Garter. Under Henry IV, the Beauforts - to whom the King would officially refer as his brothers and sister" — would rise to ever-greater heights and prosper accordingly.

Joan Beaufort and her husband Ralph Neville were always on good terms with Henry. In 1400, Joan bore her first child, the Richard Neville who would grow up to be the famous Earl of Salisbury and the father of Warwick the Kingmaker, his namesake. Fourteen other

children were born of the marriage, the eldest daughter being called Katherine, and by 1450, through a successful series of alliances, the Nevilles - and the Beauforts too — would be linked by blood or marriage to every noble family in England.

On Christmas Eve 1399, Katherine's brother-in-law, Geoffrey Chaucer, now nearing sixty, took a fifty-three-year lease on a house within the precincts of Westminster Abbey, overlooking the garden of the Lady Chapel. The length of this lease suggests he must have been in apparent good health and expected to live for some time yet to enjoy his new home, which he got rent-free, thanks to the generosity of the King. But on 21 February 1400, he was to collect his pension in person for the last time, and in June the final payment of it was delivered to his representative. It seems he had fallen ill and was unable to go to the Exchequer himself. He died at Westminster, with only twenty-three of the planned 160 *Canterbury Tales* completed, probably on 25 October 1400, and, as a tenant of the Abbey, was buried in the south transept of the church near the entrance to St Benedict's Chapel; a leaden plate bearing his Latin epitaph was hung on a pillar nearby. The elaborate tomb erected by the poet Nicholas Brigham to Chaucer's memory near his burial place, in what was to become Poets' Corner, was not built until 1555-6.

Early in 1400, the disaffected John Holland was found to have been involved in a plot to assassinate Henry IV and restore Richard II, and soon afterwards, he was captured by the Countess of Hereford at Pleshey, Essex, and there beheaded on her orders. His widow, Elizabeth of Lancaster, had remarried by 12 December following; her third husband was the gallant John Cornwall, Baron Fanhope, who had dazzled her with his performance in a tournament at York that July. Rumour had it that the amorous Elizabeth had not only gone to bed with him before the wedding but had also failed to obtain the King's licence for their marriage. Yet Henry IV indulgently forgave his wayward sister and thus avoided yet another public scandal; in 1404, he even allowed her a dower from Holland's forfeited estates.

It is probably no coincidence that Richard II, whom Holland had sought to restore, died soon afterwards, in February 1400, in Pontefract Castle - deliberately starved, it is thought, by his gaolers on the orders of the King. Adam of Usk says he perished 'miserably ... as he lay in chains ... tormented by Sir N. Swynford with starving fare', but this must be a reference to Sir Thomas Swynford, who was one of the former King's custodians. Swynford, says Usk, was 'the chief agent' of Richard's death. This grim insight reveals the darker side of Sir

Thomas's character and how zealous he was in the service of Henry IV. Further evidence to suggest Sir Thomas's involvement in the probable murder is to be found in a payment made by the Exchequer 'to a valet of Sir Thomas Swynford, coming from Pontefract to London, to certify to the King's council of certain matters which concern the King's advantage, including the hire of one horse for speed'. We have no means of knowing whether Katherine ever learned that her son was responsible for Richard's death, but she must have known of his role as gaoler at Pontefract, and like everyone else she would have heard the news of the former King's timely demise, so she may have speculated, or been suspicious, as to what had taken place.

Whether he was to any degree responsible for the former King's murder or not, Sir Thomas Swynford prospered under Henry IV: in 1401, he was made Sheriff of Lincolnshire, and by 15 May that year he had been granted the stewardship of the Lancastrian honour of Tickhill, while in 1402 Henry IV chose him as one of his chamber knights, a position that brought him into close personal contact with the King.

On 12 February 1400, Henry IV granted Katherine the manor of Laughton-en-le-Morthen near Tickhill in Yorkshire, to augment her dower. He also, around this time, assigned her £200 (£74,495) a year from Duchy lands in Huntingdonshire and 700 marks (£86,911) per annum from those in Lincolnshire, and confirmed her allowance of £1,000 from her late husband. Katherine was now enjoying an income of at least half a million pounds in modern terms, without even taking into account the issues from the dower properties that John of Gaunt had left her. That made her a substantially wealthy woman, yet apart from living in some state at the Priory, there is no evidence that she used her wealth to finance a lavish lifestyle, or that she travelled outside Lincoln and its environs, or that her hospitality became renowned; all these factors may suggest that she was in poor or declining health during her widowhood, or so devastated by the loss of the Duke that she became reclusive, and lost interest in material things. The only other reference to her during the year 1400 concerns a grant that was made to her at Kettlethorpe on 13 October, so evidently she was still capable at that time of looking after her son's manors in his absence.

One of the properties that formed part of Katherine's jointure was the town of Aylsham in Norfolk, which had been granted to John of Gaunt by Edward III in 1372; John rebuilt its parish church around 1380. Like Katherine's other dower properties, Aylsham was to revert to the

Crown on her death. Curiously, in the eighteenth century, the antiquarian Francis Blomefield, in his monumental history of Norfolk,³ refers — without citing his source - to Aylsham being held at this time by 'Katherine, wife of John Leeches [*sic*]', which has led some writers, notably Walter Rye in the 1920s, to conclude that, during her second widowhood, Katherine married a third time, to a member of the Leech family, who were prominent in local society and (according to Rye) were tenants of the Duchy of Lancaster and bore arms. This supposition cannot be correct, for had Katherine remarried, she would have had to surrender her substantial jointure, which in fact did not revert to the Crown until her death. The few references we have concerning her in the years of her widowhood all show her based in the vicinity of Lincoln.

Furthermore, the use of the style 'Dame Katherine, Duchess of Lancaster' in Katherine's tomb inscription suggests that she had become a 'vowess' in widowhood, that is, taken a vow of perpetual chastity before a priest or bishop. Vowesses were not nuns: they remained in the world and could dispose of their property. If Katherine had taken such vows, she was following a fashionably pious trend that had emerged in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and would not die out until the Reformation. Both her daughter, Joan Beaufort (who bequeathed to her son a gold ring 'with which I was sworn to God'), and her famous descendant, Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, became vowesses, Margaret whilst still married to her fourth husband, with his permission.

Katherine owned a number of other dower lands and properties in Norfolk, and also a house in Bishop's Lynn (now King's Lynn) called Wesenham Place, which had been granted to her by John of Gaunt at an unspecified date, he having purchased it from John Wesenham, a wealthy Lynn merchant, financier and oft-elected mayor who had strong links with the court. The grant is known only through an entry on the Duchy of Lancaster enrolment book for the period October 1399 to September 1405, and the reference therein indicates occupancy of the house by Katherine at some time, although given that there is no other evidence for her being there, she is unlikely to have stayed there often. Unfortunately, there is no surviving evidence as to where the house stood or what it looked like.

The fact that Katherine possessed houses in Lincoln, Boston, Grantham and King's Lynn, all flourishing ports, and is known to have had dealings with merchants from some of those towns, suggests that she had long had mercantile interests — possibly in the wool trade — that

have gone unrecorded. We know she had inherited from her father some property in Hainault, which was perhaps managed by stewards who assisted her in her business ventures, for Hainault was a major wool-trading centre. Investing money in such enterprises may have been one way in which, prior to her marriage to John of Gaunt, she had sought to expand the Swynford inheritance.

It is unlikely that — with the exception of Bishop Beaufort, who was based at Lincoln Cathedral, a stone's throw from the Priory — the widowed Katherine saw much of her sons. In the summer of 1400, John and Thomas Beaufort accompanied Henry IV on a military expedition to Scotland,³⁵ and after the King came south in September, John Beaufort accompanied him on a tour of North Wales, while Thomas was appointed Sheriff of Oxfordshire. John was granted the lands of the Welsh rebel Owen Glendower in November, and he was in London in December for a council meeting and to prepare for the coming visit of the Byzantine

Emperor Manuel II. At this time, Katherine was again looking after affairs at Kettlethorpe: in a deed dated there on 13 October, Thomas Aylemere of Kettlethorpe confirmed to her, as Duchess of Lancaster and Lady of Kettlethorpe, the grant or purchase of a small garden plot.

In 1401, John Beaufort was appointed Captain of Calais, an office he would hold until his death, and that same year he was chosen to escort Richard IPs grieving young widow, Queen Isabella, back to France. Later, he was in Calais negotiating a truce with the French. On 26 November 1401, the King gave further evidence of holding John in high favour by standing godfather to his eldest son, who was named Henry in his honour, and by granting the infant a generous annuity of 1,000 marks

(£121,492).

It is unlikely, with all this going on, that John Beaufort had much leisure to visit his mother, and from Michaelmas 1401, Katherine was even more isolated because Henry Beaufort was at Oxford for most of the academic year. Then, in May 1402, he went to court, where - thanks to his royal blood and his clever brain - he soon became one of the chief statesmen of the realm. In the month of his arrival there, he and his brother Thomas witnessed the appointment of proctors for the proposed marriages of Henry of Monmouth, now Prince of Wales, and his sister Philippa, and in the autumn, Bishop Beaufort was appointed

to the King's Council.

Henry IV remarried in 1402: his bride was Joan of Navarre, and John Beaufort was present at the proxy wedding that took place on 3 April at Eltham. In June, John was entrusted with escorting the King's daughter, Princess Blanche, to Germany for her marriage to Rupert, Duke of Bavaria and King of the Romans.

That month, John Leventhorpe, the King's trusted Receiver-General of the Duchy of Lancaster, travelled to Lincoln to speak with Katherine. We do not know the nature of their business, and it was not unusual for Leventhorpe to leave his office in London and travel about the Duchy estates in the course of his work. It is possible that Katherine realised that her health was beginning to fail and that she wished to put some of her affairs in order.

Thomas Beaufort received his first military command as Captain of Ludlow Castle on the Welsh Marches in August 1402; that year, Henry IV confirmed John of Gaunt's bequest of an annuity to him. In November, however, the King refused to accede to a parliamentary petition that John Beaufort be restored to his former rank of marquess; both Henry, and indeed John Beaufort himself, felt that that particular tide was 'alien', too closely associated with Richard II and with Robert de Vere, for whom it had been created.⁴⁷ John was sent to Brittany that month to escort Queen

Joan to England; their party docked at Falmouth in February 1403, and on the 7th, Bishop Beaufort officiated at the royal wedding in Winchester Cathedral.⁴⁸ There is no record of Katherine attending, nor does she seem to have been present at the new Queen's coronation on 26 February, which suggests that her health did not permit her to travel far these days, for these were great state occasions for most of the nobility, and as Dowager Duchess of Lancaster she would have occupied a position of honour at them.

At the end of February, Henry Beaufort was appointed to the high office of Chancellor of England, a post he would hold under three successive sovereigns. The following month, John Beaufort was sent to take up his command in Calais, where he seems to have remained until June. That March, work on John of Gaunt's new chantry in St Paul's was completed — the chantry priests were established there in July — and on the 8th, Henry IV granted licence to his late father's executors to found the chantry for Constance for which the late Duke had made provision in his will.

The next reference to Katherine is ominous. At Eltham, on 12 April 1403, in response to a petition by her, the King granted that two of the four tuns of wine received by her each year could be sent instead to Thomas Swynford and his wife. Because this petition was made so close to her death, it is more than possible that Katherine was ill and knew she would no longer need so much wine for her household, and so asked for half of it to be given to her son.

In May we find Thomas Beaufort still serving as Captain of Ludlow. Sadly, neither he nor his brother John, abroad in Calais, would ever see their mother again. She died, perhaps unexpectedly soon, probably in the solar wing of the Priory, on 10 May 1403, aged about fifty-three.

She was buried in Lincoln Cathedral, in the Angel Choir, on the south side of the sanctuary, in the western arch of the two bays near the high altar. As Duchess of Lancaster, she was entitled to such an honourable burial place, and no doubt her son, Bishop Beaufort, saw that she got it; he probably officiated at the funeral — for which no information survives — and may well have commissioned his mother's table tomb, or carried out instructions she had left for it in her will. Harvey makes a good case for its being designed by Thomas Prentys, a master sculptor from Chollaston in Northamptonshire, for Katherine's tomb has similarities to others he is known to have designed. Silva-Vigier romantically suggests that Katherine's heart was buried with John of Gaunt in St Paul's, but that is highly unlikely, since heart burial had become virtually obsolete in England by this time.

Katherine's fine tomb chest of Purbeck marble, with its moulded plinth and lid, had armorial shields encircled by garters along each side; it was surmounted by a canopied brass depicting Katherine in her widow's weeds, and bearing her arms impaled with those of John of Gaunt, while above it was raised a vaulted canopy with trefoiled arches, cusped lozenges and miniature rose bosses. The canopy and associated stonework would have been painted in bright colours. Her epitaph, recorded by Lancaster Herald, Francis Thynne, around 1600, was as follows:

Ici gist dame Katherine Duchesse de Lancastre jadis feme de le tresnoble et tresgracious prince John Duk de Lancastre fils a tresnoble roy Edward le tierce, la quelle Katherine mourust le X jour de May l'an du grace MCCCC tiers de quelle alme dieu eyt merci et pitiee. Amen."

This translates as:

Here lies Dame Katherine, Duchess of Lancaster, once the wife of the very noble and very gracious Prince, John, Duke of Lancaster, son to the very noble King Edward III, the which Katherine died the 10th day of May in the year of grace 1403, on whose soul God have mercy and pity. Amen.

On 27 June 1403, annuities amounting to £1,300 (£416,705) that had been paid to Katherine out of the issues of the Duchy of Lancaster were transferred to Queen Joan.³⁴ The late Duchess's passing had apparently occurred virtually unnoticed, for no chronicler comments on it, and there is no record of court mourning. She died as she had lived during those sad years of her widowhood, quietly and without any stir, almost as a private person. Certainly the wording of her epitaph does not reflect the grandeur of her own position, but rather emphasises her husband's rank and lineage and her need for divine mercy; this emphasis on humility and an awareness of the innate sinfulness of human nature, as well as specific sins, was typical of the age, and probably derived from the ageing Katherine's own feelings about herself and her life.

Lucraft has pertinently pointed out that we would know more about the latter if Katherine's will had survived, but there is no trace of it, either in Lincoln or in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury records.³⁵ We know that a will was made because not long after her death, the Lincoln Chapter's Clerk of the Common rode to Liddington in Wiltshire to discuss the proving of her testament with Bishop Beaufort; and in her own will of 1440, Joan Beaufort bequeathed to her eldest son a psalter willed to her by 'the illustrious lady and my mother, Lady Katherine, Duchess of Lancaster', which she directed should go to each of her sons in turn, clearly intending it to be an important family heirloom." Of the will's other provisions, there is the likelihood that Katherine bequeathed Gisors Hall in Boston to Thomas Beaufort.

On 19 May 1403, sixteen days after Katherine had died, the Priory was leased to Canon Richard of Chesterfield, but he withdrew from the agreement on 29 June 'on account of fear of the Queen'; it seems that Joan of Navarre, with the King's consent, had promised the house to Elizabeth Grey, the widow of Philip, Lord Darcy, who lived in a house nearby. Katherine had probably known her, given their close proximity and the fact that Elizabeth Grey's daughter-in-law, Margaret Grey, the present Lady Darcy, later became Sir Thomas Swynford's second wife; Elizabeth Grey could well have been a friend of Katherine's, indeed, Katherine may even have asked Queen Joan to arrange for Lady Darcy to lease the Priory after her death. Be this as it

may, the King did grant it to her.

Plans for the foundation of the chantry chapel at Lincoln for which John of Gaunt had obtained a licence in 1398 were shelved: three times, in 1400, 1402 and 1413, the Duke's executors acknowledged their failure to carry out his wishes.⁵⁹ Not until 1437 do we hear that an altar had been set up, but even then no formal foundation had apparently been made.

Katherine's chief legacy to history was her Beaufort children. John Beaufort continued to serve as Captain of Calais until 1404 or 1405, when Sir Thomas Swynford was acting as his deputy. In 1407, John Beaufort asked Henry IV to clarify the status of himself and his siblings, whereupon the King, on 10 February that year, confirmed the statute of 1397 that legitimised them, but added the words *excepta dignitate regali* ('excepting the royal dignity') in his Letters Patent, denying them the right of succession to the Crown, an act of dubious legality that would be called into question in the years to come, for it was never approved by Parliament, and the original Act had been left unamended. There has been speculation that Henry IV had always privately feared the implications of the Beauforts being legitimised, and while he himself had four strapping sons and must have known that John Beaufort's loyalty — and that of his siblings — was beyond question, he could not rely on the fealty of subsequent generations; so this clause probably reflects his determination to pre-empt any future threat to the senior Lancastrian line.

John Beaufort died on Palm Sunday, 16 March 1410, aged only thirty-seven, in the Hospital of St Katherine-by-the-Tower, a royal charity founded in 1148 by Matilda of Boulogne, the wife of King Stephen, to offer spiritual comfort and alms to the poor; given the fact that its patrons had always been royal ladies, that John Beaufort died there, and that John of Gaunt had founded a chantry in the hospital, as well as its connection with her name-saint, it is highly likely that the hospital had been under Katherine's patronage when she was Duchess of Lancaster. John was buried in St Michael's Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, near his uncle the Black Prince and the shrine of St Thomas a Becket, a resting place probably chosen for him by Henry IV, who was himself buried nearby in 1413.

John was succeeded as Earl of Somerset by his eight-year-old son, Henry. His widow, Margaret Holland, became the wife of Henry IV's third son, Thomas, Duke of Clarence, and in due course she and her second husband were interred in the same tomb as John Beaufort,

with the effigy of Margaret recumbent between those of her two spouses. The latter are similar, but John's effigy is shorter and his face, distinguished by its Plantagenet nose and heavy-lidded eyes, may well be an attempt at a likeness.

Henry Beaufort was the most dynamic of Katherine's sons. In 1404 he was translated from the See of Lincoln to that of Winchester. He stood high in the counsels of Henry IV and his son, Henry V (who succeeded his father in 1413), was one of the chief mainstays of the House of Lancaster, and played a prominent role in the history of England during the first half of the fifteenth century, becoming enormously rich and influential in the process; it has been said that he was probably the greatest royal creditor of the age. In 1418, he narrowly missed being elected Pope. Three years later, he was nominated godfather to Henry V's only son, and when that infant became Henry VI in 1422, he was entrusted to the care of Henry and Thomas Beaufort. During the minority of Henry VI, Bishop Beaufort was a leading figure on the regency Council, and in 1426 was made a cardinal, achieving one of the highest accolades the Church could bestow. In 1431, he was one of the judges who condemned Joan of Arc to be burned at the stake. He died at Wolvesey Palace, Winchester, in the spring of 1447, aged seventy-two, and was buried in the chantry he had founded in Winchester Cathedral; his parents were among those for whom he had requested that perpetual prayers be said there. He had one bastard child, a daughter called Joan. It has often been stated that her mother was Eleanor FitzAlan, daughter of the Earl of Arundel, but there is no evidence to support that claim.

There is a fine effigy of Cardinal Beaufort, wearing his red robes and wide-brimmed hat, on his tomb, and a stone head of him at Bishop's Waltham Palace, Hampshire. It has recently been suggested that a portrait of a cardinal by the celebrated Flemish artist Jan Van Eyck may also portray him. The sitter was once thought to have been Cardinal Niccolo Albergati, but his well-fleshed appearance and fur-trimmed robe does not ride with what we know of the ascetic Albergati. Henry Beaufort was in Ghent in 1432, at the time this portrait is thought to have been painted, and clearly the sitter was an important man. Could this cardinal, with his closely shaven face, large nose, keen brown eyes and pleasant, playful smile, have been the son of Katherine Swynford and John of Gaunt?

The very able Thomas Beaufort also had a distinguished career in royal service. In 1403, soon after his mother's death, he was made Admiral of the Northern Fleet, and on 21 July that year he fought

under the future Henry V at the Battle of Shrewsbury. He again served as admiral in 1408-9, and in 1410, he reached the pinnacle of his career when he was appointed Chancellor of England, as well as Captain of Calais. He resigned the chancellorship in 1412, the year he was created Earl of Dorset, and in which he saw military service in France, Henry V having abandoned the peace policy of his grandfather, John of Gaunt, and resurrected England's ancient claim to the French throne. Thomas was the King's Lieutenant in Aquitaine in 1413, and in 1415, with his cousin Thomas Chaucer, he wielded his sword for Henry V in the French campaign that ended with the jubilant English victory at Agincourt. The town of Harfleur was also taken, and Thomas Beaufort was made its captain. He was appointed Lieutenant of Normandy in 1416, and created Duke of Exeter on 18 November that year. Two years later, he took an active part in Henry V's ruthless push to conquer Normandy, and was created Count of Harcourt on 1 July.

Thomas was widely renowned for his highly developed sense of chivalry, his moral rectitude, his Christian piety, and his charity to the poor and to travellers. He was impervious to corruption, refusing all gifts and rewards, and he forbade swearing, tale-bearing and lying in his household. It is tempting to wonder if he had been deeply humiliated by the irregularity of his birth and his former bastardy, and if all this stiff propriety was a subconscious attempt to compensate for those stigmas.

When the King's brother, Thomas, Duke of Clarence, was defeated and killed at the Battle of Beauge in 1421, Thomas Beaufort was taken prisoner by the French; he was released the following year. Soon afterwards, Henry V died, having entrusted the guardianship of his heir, the infant Henry VI, to his 'dear and true Duke of Exeter, full of all worthyhood', whereupon Thomas returned to England to share responsibility for the upbringing of his nephew with his brother, Bishop Beaufort. From 1424, their cousin, Thomas Chaucer, was also a member of the regency Council.

Thomas Beaufort died on 31 December 1426, and was buried in the Lady Chapel of the abbey of Bury St Edmund's in Suffolk. He left no heir, his only son Henry having died young. In his will, he made provision for Masses to be celebrated for the souls of his parents, and left a silver-gilt cup to his half-brother, Sir Thomas Swynford. His tomb was lost when the Lady Chapel was pulled down in 1538 during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In 1772, a lead coffin thought to be Thomas Beaufort's was found by workmen on the supposed site of

its altar. The remains it contained were well preserved in cerecloth, and were reburied in a wooden casket near the north-east crossing pier.

Thomas Chaucer, who had turned down a knighthood, died on 14 March 1434 and was buried at Ewelme. His only daughter Alice married William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, and thus became a duchess, the highest rank to which a woman could aspire outside the royal family. Her son, John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, was to marry Edward IV's sister Elizabeth of York, and their son, John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, was acknowledged as heir to the throne by Richard III after the latter's son died in 1484. Thus the descendants of Geoffrey Chaucer, the son of a London vintner, were raised to the highest echelons of the nobility and might, but for a turn of fate, have become kings of England - and it was all largely due to Geoffrey's sister-in-law having become the mistress and later wife of the mighty Duke of Lancaster.

Joan Beaufort proved to be a strong-willed, formidable lady, with wide literary interests — she liked pious works, romances and histories, and the poet Thomas Hoccleve dedicated a book to her. Yet she also demonstrated a deep religious piety that embraced the mysticism of Margery Kempe, the holy woman of Lynn. In 1404, Joan's husband, Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmorland, conscious of his lady's royal connections and dynastic importance, disinherited his legitimate son by his first wife in favour of Joan's children, provoking a legal wrangle that would drag on for years, but in which the ruthlessly determined Joan would ultimately triumph.

In 1424, Joan's daughter Cecily Neville married Ralph Neville's ward, Richard, Duke of York. York was the grandson of Edmund of Langley, fifth son of Edward III and younger brother of John of Gaunt, and he was also descended, through Philippa of Clarence and the Mortimers, from Lionel of Antwerp, Edward III's second surviving son. Thus he had a strong claim to the throne, which he would assert in 1460 during the Wars of the Roses, insisting that he had a better right to rule than Henry VI. York was killed that same year at the Battle of Wakefield, but his claim was inherited by his son, Edward, Earl of March, the eldest of the fourteen children born of his marriage to Cecily Neville.

Ralph Neville died in 1425, and was buried in Staindrop Church, County Durham, beside his first wife. His effigy may be seen there today, lying between those of both his ladies, but although Joan

founded a chantry at Staindrop for herself and her husband in 1437, she was never to be buried with him. Either she disdained to lie for eternity near his first wife, or she wanted to be with her mother: in her will, dated 10 May 1440, the thirty-seventh anniversary of Katherine's death, she asked if the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln would enlarge her tomb enclosure so that she, Joan, could be interred 'in the same altar where the body of Lady Katherine, Duchess of Lancaster, my mother, is buried'. On 28 November 1437, she had obtained a royal licence for her second foundation, a perpetual chantry in Lincoln Cathedral for the souls of both her parents, finally fulfilling their wishes almost forty years after John of Gaunt had obtained licence to found such a chantry 'for the good estate of himself and Katherine his wife'. The foundation, which dated from 16 July 1439, was to be formally called 'the Chantry of Katherine, late Duchess of Lancaster, in the cathedral church of Lincoln'. Two chaplains were appointed to celebrate Mass each morning at 7 a.m. at the altar beside the tomb, and Joan made provision for prayers to be offered for Henry IV, Henry V and her late husband, Ralph Neville, as well.

Joan herself died on 13 November 1440, at Howden, Yorkshire, aged fifty-nine, and was buried with Katherine as she had wished; their two table tombs stood side by side, and Joan's also had a memorial brass and arms encircled by garters and Lancastrian collars of SS. Her epitaph, engraved on a brass plate, was recorded by Sandford in the seventeenth century; unlike Katherine's, it depicted its subject in heroic vein, asserting, 'The whole nation mourns her death.' It was after Joan's interment, when the tomb space was enlarged, that an ornamental wrought-iron grille was set up to enclose it, as she had requested.⁷⁹ As Bishop Beaufort was a supervisor of his sister's will, he may have been responsible for the commissioning of her tomb.

I am indebted to Jackie Goodman, the wife of Professor Goodman, for sharing her interesting theory concerning Joan Beaufort. There is a miniature of Joan and her daughters in the Neville Book of Hours,^{8'} and in it there appears a scroll on which is written the first verse of Psalm 50: 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great Mercy. This rather echoes the sentiments in Katherine Swynford's epitaph, and expresses a similar humility, awareness of sin, and penitence. But verse 6 of the Psalm says, 'For behold, I was conceived in iniquities: and in my sins did my mother conceive me.' If Joan was responsible for this psalm being quoted in the miniature, which is possible, then Jackie Goodman may be making a very valid point when she suggests that Joan's sense of her own sinfulness derived from the circumstances of her birth and her early awareness of her bastardy, and that to some

extent she bore the burden of her mother's guilt, which she attempted to expunge all her life by religious observance and the study of contemplative literature, just as her brother Thomas had sought to occupy the moral high ground. Hence her desire to share Katherine's sepulchre, honour her memory and secure for her eternal salvation.

We have seen how, by 1450, through advantageous marriages, Joan's Neville children came to be related to nearly every peer in the realm. But there was greater glory to come. In 1461, her grandson, Edward, Earl of March, deposed Henry VI and seized the throne as Edward IV, first sovereign of the House of York. Henry was briefly restored in 1470 through the machinations of the man who had once been the mainstay of Edward's throne, Warwick the Kingmaker — another of Joan's grandsons. When Henry VI was murdered in 1471, the direct line of the royal House of Lancaster, the kings descended from John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster, became extinct. In 1483, Edward IV himself died, and yet another of Joan's grandsons, his brother, Richard III, ascended the throne. Thus did Katherine, the herald's daughter, become the great-grandmother of kings.

Of course, John of Gaunt had many other descendants; indeed, he could justifiably be termed the 'grandfather of Europe'. In the Iberian kingdoms, and among the Burgundian Habsburgs, his memory was long honoured as a noble progenitor of dynasties. In 1406, his grandson, Catalina's son, Juan II, succeeded to the throne of Castile. In 1469, Juan II's daughter, Isabella, Queen of Castile, would marry Ferdinand, King of Aragon, and thus unite Spain as its joint sovereigns. Their youngest daughter, Catalina of Aragon, born in 1485, was named for her great-grandmother, Catalina of Lancaster (who had died paralysed in 1418), and became — with her name anglicised as Katherine of Aragon - the first wife of Henry VIII of England, and by him the mother of Mary I. Thus the bloodline of John of Gaunt was continued in the royal families of Spain and, through intermarriage, Austria, and was carried back into the English royal family.

It flowed in Portugal, too, where Philippa of Lancaster died of plague in 1415. In 1433, her son Duarte I succeeded to the Portuguese throne, and for the next two hundred years, her descendants would rule there. Her sister, the spirited Elizabeth of Lancaster, Katherine Swynford's other erstwhile charge, died in 1426 and was buried in Burford Church, Shropshire, where a fine painted effigy graces her tomb.

John and Katherine had many descendants in the Beaufort line. John Beaufort's eldest son, Henry, Earl of Somerset, died young at seventeen in 1418, when he was succeeded by his fourteen-year-old brother John.

Their sister, another Joan Beaufort, married James I, King of Scots, in 1424, and thus Katherine's granddaughter became a queen. Through Queen Joan, the sovereigns of the royal House of Stewart (later Stuart) traced their descent from John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford.

In 1443, the younger John Beaufort was created Duke of Somerset by Henry VI, the second of Katherine's descendants to achieve ducal rank. That year, his wife, Margaret Beauchamp, bore their only child, a daughter, the Lady Margaret Beaufort. John Beaufort did not long enjoy his dukedom. He died, perhaps by his own hand, on 27 May 1444, and was buried in Wimborne Minster, Dorset, leaving his daughter as his heiress. In 1450, the young Lady Margaret was the unwitting focus of a plot by William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk (the husband of Alice Chaucer), to marry her to his son and make her Queen of England upon the murder of Henry VI - a treasonable plan that cost the Duke his head. Yet it was proof enough that a Beaufort claimant to the throne was a viable prospect to some.

In October 1455, Margaret Beaufort, aged only twelve, was married to Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, the twenty-five-year-old son of Henry V's widow, Katherine of Valois, by Owen Tudor, with whom she had formed a misalliance — some say a marriage, although there is no proof of that - in the late 1420s and 1430s. Margaret's marriage did not last long, for Edmund died in November 1456, leaving his young wife pregnant. Their son, Henry Tudor, was born on 28 January 1457. After the deposition of Henry VI in 1461, Henry Tudor was deprived of the earldom of Richmond, and was forced to spend most of his youth in exile.

From the 1450s onwards, the Beauforts were prominent in public life. John Beaufort's brother Edmund succeeded to the dukedom of Somerset and was a mainstay of Henry VI — and one of the chief rivals of Richard, Duke of York - at the onset of the Wars of the Roses, before his death in 1455 at the Battle of St Albans. His son, Henry Beaufort, the third Duke, another prominent Lancastrian, was executed in 1464, and *his* brother Edmund lost his head in 1471, after fighting for Henry VI at the Battle of Tewkesbury; another brother,

John, fell in the battle. Thus the male line of the Beauforts died out. Henry, the last Duke, had never married, but he left a bastard son, Charles Somerset, born around 1460. He was later created Earl of Worcester, and died in 1526, in the reign of Henry VIII. The present Duke of Beaufort, whose dukedom was created in 1682 by Charles II — in recognition of his 'most notable descent from King Edward III by John de Beaufort, eldest son of John of Gaunt by Katherine Swynford' — is descended from him. There is an amusing but apocryphal story of how Henry Charles FitzRoy, 8th Duke of Beaufort, showed Queen Victoria documents containing proof that John of Gaunt had married Katherine and fathered John Beaufort before the birth of Henry IV, thus rendering spurious the claims of every English sovereign after 1399; Victoria is said to have thanked him for bringing the papers to her attention, then promptly thrown them into the fire.

From the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses, the possibility that the Beauforts might have a claim to the throne began to be taken more seriously. Henry IV had barred them from ever succeeding, but on dubious legal grounds, a matter that exercised not a few legal minds. In the 1470s, the exiled Henry Tudor clearly regarded himself as Henry VI's heir and the rightful Lancastrian claimant to the throne, and when Richard III usurped the throne in 1483, after having almost certainly eliminated Edward IV's sons, the so-called Princes in the Tower, Henry Tudor vowed to marry the Princes' sister, Elizabeth of York, and take the English throne. In retaliation, Richard III publicly asserted that Henry had no true claim to it because the Beauforts had been 'gotten in double adultery', an assertion that was only half-true, but has been accepted by many as a fact. We have seen, however, that the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Katherine Swynford was a widow when she became the mistress of the married John of Gaunt.

In August 1485, Henry Tudor invaded England and defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, where the latter was killed. In October, the victor was crowned Henry VII, first sovereign of the House of Tudor, and in January 1486 he married Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the Houses of Lancaster and York. Henry and Elizabeth were both Katherine Swynford's great-great-grandchildren. In 1485, in Henry VII's first Parliament, Richard II's statute of 1397, which removed the stigma of bastardy from the Beauforts, was re-enacted.

Notwithstanding this, the Tudor sovereigns made very little of their descent from Katherine Swynford, which is perhaps understandable; her notoriety had not dimmed — witness Richard III's libel, which clearly presupposed that people would know what he was talking

about - and her ancestry left something to be desired. It may be for this reason that Katherine merits barely a mention in Tudor chronicles. Much as he had glossed over scandal in an epitaph for his grandmother, Katherine of Valois, when it came to providing a new inscription for John of Gaunt's tomb in St Paul's, Henry VII laid emphasis on Katherine's beauty rather than her virtues, as has been noted. It is unlikely that his fourth daughter, Katherine, born at the Tower a century after Katherine Swynford's death, was named after her, as some have suggested; probably she was so called after the Queen's sister, Katherine of York, or Katherine of Valois.

In the reign of Henry VIII, who succeeded his father in 1509, Katherine was still discreetly omitted from the royal pedigree. In a pageant given at Leadenhall in 1520 to honour the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, an actor representing John of Gaunt sat at the foot of a tree, from which rose many branches representing all the kings and queens who could claim lineage from him. Some were sprung from Katherine too, but she was not alluded to. Again, in plans drawn up for Henry VIII's funeral by the Garter King of Arms, reference is made tantalisingly to 'a banner of Lancaster with the marriage', which probably refers to the union of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York rather than that of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. Thus Katherine was virtually erased from history, and the fleeting references that were made to her by historians over the centuries usually referred disparagingly to her immorality or made a brief mention of her being the ancestress of the Tudors. Until 1954, that is, when Anya Seton's *Katherine* was published, and people began taking a more sympathetic and romantic view of its heroine.

After Katherine died, the Swynfords lived on at Kettlethorpe, and for a time her son Sir Thomas continued his career in royal service, being involved in 1404-6 in peace negotiations with France and Flanders. From 1406, he was retained by his half-brother, Thomas Beaufort, and there is no further record of his being employed by the Crown. He does not appear to have fallen from favour, though, for in 1411, when Thomas was having problems laying claim to 'divers inheritances in the county of Hainault' that had 'lately descended' to him 'from the most renowned lady Katherine de Roelt, deceased, late Duchess of Lancaster, his mother', Henry IV stepped in to assist 'our beloved and truly trusted knight'. And Thomas was in need of such help, having recently been declared an outlaw on account of being in debt to a London draper.

We do not know who was then in possession of those lands in

Hainault, which Katherine had clearly owned — it was possibly Roët relatives who had entrenched themselves thinking their tenure would not be disturbed by their English kinsfolk. But whoever it was, 'certain persons in those parts' were determined not to be ousted: they had expressed their doubts that Sir Thomas Swynford 'was begotten in lawful matrimony', and had 'not permitted the said Thomas to possess the said inheritance or to receive the farms, rents or issues thereof. The implication was surely that Thomas was Katherine's bastard son by John of Gaunt, their affair having become notorious on the Continent as well as in England. But Henry IV was quick to set the matter straight: in October 1411, he issued a mandate under his Great Seal firmly attesting Sir Thomas's legitimacy:

Be it known unto you all that the aforesaid Thomas is son and heir of the aforesaid Katherine, begotten and born in lawful wedlock, and that a certain writing of the said Thomas, to these our present letters annexed, sealed with his seal of arms, is his deed; and that he and his father, and all his paternal ancestors, have in times past borne the said arms and used the like seal.

We hear no more of the matter, or whether Thomas was successful in his claim. Possibly his absence from royal service can be accounted for by his need to visit Hainault to pursue it and perhaps set his affairs there in order. In 1426-7 there is a record of him reclaiming Kettlethorpe; possibly he had needed to lease or mortgage it to finance himself while he was living abroad.

Thomas's wife, Jane Crophill, died between 1416 and 1421. She had borne him two known children: his heir, Thomas, around 1406 (he was twenty-six when his father died in 1432), who spent his youth in the service of his uncle, Thomas Beaufort, and a daughter, named Katherine after her grandmother. This Katherine had married Sir William Drury of Rougham, Suffolk, by 1428, and bore him six children before dying in 1478. By 1427, Cardinal Beaufort had secured an heiress, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Beauchamp of Powick, as a bride for young Thomas Swynford.

Before July 1421, Sir Thomas Swynford had married a second time, his bride being Margaret Grey, daughter of Henry, Lord Grey de Wilton, and widow of John, Baron Darcy.⁹⁵ There was one son of this marriage, William Swynford, to whom Cardinal Beaufort left £400 (£181,426) and some silver plate in his will. Sir Thomas died on 2 April 1432, and was probably buried in Kettlethorpe Church, although there is no proof of that, since the church has long been rebuilt and

there are no records of the mediaeval memorials. His widow, Margaret, survived until 1454. Because he had enfeoffed his estates to trustees, he died effectively landless.

His son, the younger Sir Thomas, did not long outlive him: he was dead by 8 January 1440, when his heir, Thomas Swynford III, was aged four or five. In 1468, this latter Thomas conveyed Kettlethorpe and Coleby to his uncle, William Swynford, the son of the first Sir Thomas by his second wife; William passed away before 1483, having willed those properties back to his nephew. When Thomas Swynford III died childless on 3 May 1498, the male line of Hugh and Katherine Swynford's descendants came to an end, and Kettlethorpe and Coleby passed to the heirs of Thomas's daughter Margaret, the wife of Thomas Pauncefote.

Kettlethorpe descended in turn to the Beaumonts, the Meryngs and others before coming into the possession of the Amcotts family in the eighteenth century. Their arms are still displayed above the front door. In the mid-seventeenth century, the brick walls that still encircle the gardens were built, while the hall itself was largely remodelled in 1713, at which time the fourteenth-century gatehouse was probably reconstructed. A drawing by J. Claude Nattes of the refurbished house, then called Kettlethorpe Park, survives from 1793, and shows it to have been a large but undistinguished residence. In the early nineteenth century, the hall was allowed to fall into a decline; in 1857, Weston Cracroft-Amcotts had it demolished and built a plain redbrick Victorian house, into which was incorporated some of the mediaeval fabric surviving from Katherine's time.

That is the house that stands today, in seventeen acres of grounds. Traces of Katherine Swynford's deer park also survive. In 1983, Kettlethorpe was purchased by the Rt Hon. Douglas Hogg, QC, MP, Viscount Hailsham, whose coat of arms, like that of the Swynfords who once inhabited the manor, bears three boars' heads.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, during the Wars of the Roses, the tomb of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster was defaced and the original painted alabaster effigies destroyed. It was John and Katherine's descendant, Henry VII, who in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century had the tomb restored and a new epitaph set up to 'the illustrious Prince John, named Plantagenet, King of Castile and Leon, Duke of Lancaster, Lieutenant of Aquitaine, Grand Seneschal of England'. This is the epitaph in which it is incorrectly

stated that it was Constance, and not Blanche, who was buried with the Duke, and in which Katherine's beauty rather than her virtue was emphasised: 'His third wife was Katherine, of a knightly family, and an extraordinarily beautiful and feminine woman; they had numerous offspring, and from these came the maternal family of King Henry VII.' The chief function of the epitaph was to publicise the Duke's illustrious descendants and connections. New effigies, wearing Tudor costume and armour (the Duke in a surcoat emblazoned with his arms, the Duchess in an ermine-trimmed mantle), with hands clasped in prayer, were placed on the tomb, probably in the 1530s, since Blanche's headdress is of that date; an earlier headdress would have had longer lappets.

During the Reformation, the chantry founded for the souls of John and Blanche was dissolved and its endowments appropriated by the Crown. Little damage appears to have been done to the tomb itself, which was described in 1614 as 'a most stately monument'. A drawing of it was made in c.1610; Wenceslaus Hollar did an engraving, as did Sir William Dugdale, Garter King of Arms, then Richard Gaywood

(around 1664-5) for the royal genealogist Francis Sandford. These pictures show an arcaded tomb chest with trefoil motifs and a fine triple-arched canopy with a tabernacle screen, on which the Duke's armorial achievements — his lance, cap of maintenance and shield — were displayed. The canopy or tabernacle was defaced during the Civil War, and never repaired.

On 4 September 1666, when Old St Paul's Cathedral was destroyed during the Great Fire of London, John of Gaunt's tomb 'suffered the violence of the late conflagration' and was irrevocably lost, 'burnt to ashes'. It is unlikely, therefore, that the corpses of John and Blanche were among those that were dragged from the ruins and propped up in Convocation House Yard for passers-by to gawp at.

Katherine's tomb, and that of her daughter Joan, standing side by side, were described by John Leland in the early sixteenth century,¹ and were also engraved by Dugdale around 1640. Today, those tombs stand end to end, with Joan's, the smaller, apparently cut down at some stage, at the foot of Katherine's. There are matrices where the canopied brasses once lay, and Katherine's tomb has indents to show where armorial shields were originally displayed. The patterned vault of the heavily restored canopy, its east and west abutments and the wrought-iron grille on its buttressed stone plinth are all that survive of the chantry chapel that once housed the tombs.³

The perpetual chantry set up by the Countess Joan lasted until the mid-sixteenth century. It was dissolved during the reign of Edward VI, at which time it was valued at £i3.6s.8d (£4,203), and contained two chalices, two silver cruets (for holding holy water and communion wine), a silver pax and a silver sacring bell.

In 1644, the tombs were defaced, the brasses ripped off and stolen, and the stonework of the chantry badly damaged during the sacking of Lincoln Cathedral by Cromwellian soldiers in the Civil War; a 'bargeload' of spoils was floated down the River Witham to the sea, and the brasses and other tomb furniture may well have been on it. By 1672, the tomb chests had been moved into their present positions and the canopy clumsily restored."⁷ A nineteenth-century plan for a 'Gothic' restoration of the monuments was fortunately abandoned. Of the tombs of John of Gaunt's three wives, Katherine's is the only one to survive. Claims on the internet that the tombs are empty and that the remains of Katherine and Joan were despoiled by the Roundheads are unsubstantiated; there is no record of the bodies being disturbed, and they are probably still in a vault under the pavement beneath the tombs.

On 10 May each year, Katherine's name is always included in the obit prayer offered up during Evensong in Lincoln Cathedral. She is worthy of remembrance, and not only because of the famous and illustrious people who have descended from her and John of Gaunt — among them the present Queen Elizabeth II, who is also Duchess of Lancaster, the late Diana, Princess of Wales, and nearly every monarch in Europe; five American presidents, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and George W. Bush; Sir Winston Churchill, the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson and the philosopher Bertrand Russell, 'besides many other potent princes and eminent nobility of foreign parts'. Her memory is also honoured because she is a unique figure in the annals of mediaeval England, a royal mistress who became a duchess and the foundress of the Tudor dynasty, and above all a lady, as Chaucer said, so 'well deserving' of the fame that is still hers today.

Appendix: Anya Seton's Katherine

In my efforts to discover the truth about Katherine Swynford - or as much of the truth as we can ever know or guess at — I have remained very conscious of the fact that Anya Seton's novel continues to exert a tremendous influence over many people's vision of Katherine. I can testify myself to the novel's popularity: during the course of many events at bookshops and elsewhere, I have frequently been asked what my next project is to be about, and there is invariably a frisson of excitement in the audience when I say, 'Katherine Swynford.' Afterwards, I can guarantee that several delighted people will come over and say, 'I read *Katherine* .. .' Even in the solemn stillness of Lincoln Cathedral, the notice by Katherine Swynford's tomb reads: 'This is Katherine, of Anya Seton's famous historical book.' The Cathedral Library holds annual Study Days on Katherine, and tickets are in high demand. If you enter 'Katherine Swynford' on any internet search engine, you will get thousands of responses.

Of course, there have been other fictional portrayals of her — she is the model for Bronwen Morgan in Susan Howatch's ambitious saga, *The Wheel of Fortune*, and she appears prominently too in Jean Plaidy's *Passage to Pontefract*, a fictionalised life of Richard II. But nowhere is she depicted so vibrantly as in *Katherine*, which has been called one of the best historical novels ever written, 'an all-time classic' on a par with the works of Margaret Mitchell, Mary Renault and Dorothy Dunnett.

Seton spent several years researching *Katherine*, and her book has been repeatedly commended for its historical accuracy. It has even been listed in the bibliographies of works of historical non-fiction, which is no mean achievement. On the debit side, this has resulted in it achieving more credibility for accuracy than it deserves: Jeannette Lucraft, in her recent academic study of Katherine Swynford, has asserted that I myself quoted details from it as facts in my book *Lancaster and York*; actually (and apologies are hopefully in order), they came from F. George Kay's *Lady of the Sun*, a biography of Alice Perrers published in 1966, and it may be that Kay, in his day, relied more heavily on *Katherine* than he should have done, as Lucraft is correct in asserting that those details are not to be found in any contemporary source. For *Katherine* is essentially a novel, and although its author made impressive and commendable efforts to get her facts right, there are three good reasons why we should not accept

hers as a valid portrayal of the historical Katherine Swynford.

First, *Katherine* is essentially of its own time. Seton's John of Gaunt is derived partly from nineteenth-century perceptions of him, and partly from Clark Gable's portrayal of Rhett Buder in *Gone With The Wind*: one internet reviewer described John of Gaunt, as depicted in the novel, as 'the sexiest hero since Rhett Butler'. Then, by her own admission, Seton applies Freudian psychology in determining reasons for her characters' behaviour. Above all, the morality that informs *Katherine* is essentially that of the 1950s, not the 1300s: the heroine agonises over her illicit love in the manner of an early-nineteenth-century romantic, and when it comes to sex, she is a passive partner, leaving her man to initiate it. And she believes that a marriage based on love is a normal aim for any woman, a concept quite foreign to the fourteenth-century mind.

Second, *Katherine* is as much about Anya Seton as it is about Katherine Swynford. Anya Seton was born Ann Seton in 1906, the only child of two highly successful, eccentric and fame-hungry writers. Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946) was born in Durham, England, but later emigrated to Canada and the USA, and wrote more than fifty celebrated books on wildlife and anthropology, while his highly independent wife, Grace Gallatin (1872-1959), published seven popular books about her own exotic travels. Both of Ann's parents journeyed widely in order to research their books, and she inherited their restless spirit, wanderlust and thirst for fame and fortune. Like her heroine, Katherine Swynford, she grew up to be stunningly beautiful, and although she was clever and extremely knowledgeable, she was essentially a socialite and a style icon, who was feted by the high society of New York and Old Greenwich, Connecticut. A thousand guests attended her first wedding.

By the age of seventeen, Ann had abandoned her former ambitions to be a doctor or an opera singer; she now dreamed of becoming a writer. She was already keeping journals that reveal her adolescent obsession with her appearance, and her early amorous adventures. In 1923, after a passionate courtship, she married a young Rhodes scholar, Hamilton Cottier, and then spent two very interesting and enjoyable years living with him in England at Oxford before moving to the duller academic world of Princeton, New Jersey, where her husband was based from 1925. By 1928, she was the mother of two children, Pamela and Seton, and feeling restless and suffocated by boredom. A highly publicised divorce in Reno was quickly followed by a second marriage in 1929, to an investment counsellor called

Hamilton Chase, by whom Ann had another daughter, Clemencie.

In the 1930s, Ann began writing in earnest, selling articles on home-making to magazines. She published her first short story in 1938, and in 1941, her debut novel, *My Theodosia*, immediately hit the best-seller lists, bringing Anya Seton, as she was now calling herself, fame, fortune and legions of fans. In 1946 alone, her earnings from her books totalled a staggering \$94,000. Nine more hugely successful novels were to follow; all were 'Book of the Month Club' choices, and two were made into Hollywood films. In 1954, there were calls for *Katherine* to be made into a movie starring Charlton Heston and Susan Hayward, but in the moral climate of 1950s America — in which one critic branded the book as 'obscene and evil' - it never happened, because it would have been impossible to show two adulterous lovers living openly in sin, producing four bastard children and then enjoying a happy ending without incurring any penalties for their immorality. In some ways, the novel mirrors Seton's own colourful private life which was the subject of extensive media interest. And her sympathetic portrayal of Katherine Swynford must reflect her own views on adultery and illicit sex. It is on record that she at first found the accusations of immorality amusing, then offensive, then simply tedious.

Seton became renowned for her meticulous research - she refused to compromise historical accuracy in the interests of telling a good story, and she travelled widely in search of information, feeling that she could not put her subjects in authentic settings unless she had visited the places where they lived their lives. She spent four years researching *Katherine*, and journeyed all round England; even today, people remember her hard at work in Lincoln Cathedral Library. She hated it when her books were described as 'historical romances', preferring to call them 'biographical novels'. She might have said 'autobiographical', for she invested them with many of the moral, emotional, psychological and cultural aspects of her own life.

Anya Seton was divorced from her second husband in 1968, and published her last book, *Smouldering Fires*, in 1975. Although her journals reveal that she remained obsessed with her 'love life' well into her seventh decade, her declining years were overshadowed by an advancing illness that prevented her from writing. She died in 1990, her fame long forgotten.

The third reason why we should be cautious in accepting Anya Seton's

portrayal of Katherine Swynford as historically accurate is that *Katherine* is essentially a romantic novel in the classic sense. Not just an old-fashioned love story, it is an emotional assertion of the self and a vivid exploration of the individual experience of its heroine. It is progressive in its championship of the beauty of sexual freedom and its implied condemnation of conservative morality, yet it also captures a sense of the spiritual with its theme of love and redemption. Threaded through it are the classic romantic clichés of remembered childhood, unrequited love, cruel conflict and lonely exile. It is an intense book, a romantic novel in the widest sense: passion and the sublime are at its core. And Katherine herself is the perfect romantic heroine: beautiful, sensuous and loving.

Despite its substance, and Seton's own objections, *Katherine* was more often than not regarded as a lightweight 'romance novel', and was frequently displayed in this category in bookshops and libraries. Hence, when bodice-rippers became the fashion in the 1970s, *Katherine*, with its few discreetly erotic sex scenes, appeared outdated and fell from favour, as did Anya Seton's other novels. Yet for many readers, clearly, it remained a favourite book, and recent years have seen its reappearance in print, both in Britain and the USA, where an edition featuring the full original text (which was never printed in Britain) is now available. There can be no doubt that this book, with its lovely but flawed heroine, is held in deep affection by a large number of people. It is important to remember, however, that although - as Anya Seton herself stated — it is based on history, it is a work of fiction.